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THE WINGS OF TIME

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WINGS OF TIME

BY

ELIZABETH NEWPORT HEPBURN

The wings of Time are black and white Pied with Morning and with Night, Mountain tall and ocean deep Trembling balance duly keep.... — Emerson.



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С. L. H.

Beyond gray swirls of pain Across the dragging years I hear your laugh again Disdaining tears . . .

Stranger than Life or Death And tonic as the Sea Comes, now and then, this breath Of Memory.

Comes too a flare of pride . . . You were so strong, so true Whether you lived or died You'd still be-You!

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BOOK I LITTLE GIRLHOOD

THE WINGS OF TIME

CHAPTER I

BUCEPHALUS RUNS AWAY

T O the child it seemed a dreary place, a house no selfrespecting ghost would care to haunt, with no attraction whatever for hobgoblins or elves or pixies. It was a house alien to all spirit of adventure, such adventure as was suggested by a thrilling green and silver book telling of gods and goddesses, of Olympus and Erebus, of golden apples and of a long grim war waged about a wonderful woman named Helen. . .

After all it was just a boarding house, big and bare and dreary, and you lived there because it was near the center of the universe, the Office, and because you must. For of course it had one ugly virtue: it was cheap. Yet how little Sally Dallam hated the long drab dining room, with plaster perpetually peeling from the high white ceiling, and the melancholy parlor on the second floor, its stuffed furniture covered with faded magenta damask, its wallpaper ornamented with what appeared to be a decoration of crouching brown spiders.

The proprietors, old Mr. and Mrs. Ingle, were somehow like the furniture, fat, faded, depressing. To Sally they seemed like dull pictures in an old almanac rather than live persons whom you saw every day. Yet there was one strange phenomenon about the Ingles, and this concerned their lame dog, Ranger, whom Sally dearly loved, and the phenomenon was that the dog loved the Ingles as well as Sally. This most companionable canine would follow old Mr. Ingle about the house and lick Mrs. Ingle's creasy hands, and the little girl felt that after all it was difficult to label people properly. As Alfred said. . ,

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But Alfred comes later, and we must begin with Sally and her mother and the grim boarding house and that abysmal marble palace known as "the Office."

Even in this early day, the beginning nineties, Washington swarmed with such buildings, usually made of marble, low and vast and impersonal as though some composite master mind had designed them all. From nine until four each day they were peopled by men and women, the men much like men everywhere but the women already differing subtly from those luckier wives and maidens whose "place was in the home," to adopt the hackneyed jargon of a later period. For these women in the government departments were early representatives of that dreary yet inevitable thing called the "economic independence of women," and if, externally, they were much like other women, within their minds a seed was beginning to sprout, the seed of healthy doubt as to the universal, inevitable superiority of the male sex.

Sally's mother, Honor Dallam, was hampered by an inconvenient sense of humor; she would never have made an effective reformer. Moreover she lacked one essential of successful uplifters, an essential which may be described as the single-track mind. Yet she earned her own living, and Sally's, and had some singular notions concerning the education of little girls, possibly the outgrowth of her own grim experience of the shelteredlife system, which had ended abruptly after her marriage and the coming of Sally. So Sally was trained to be independent, to wait on herself, and even shown the proper method of getting off a street car in motion.

"'Of course you ought to wait until the car stops, Sally. And I hope you always will. But if you can't, then hold on tight, jump forward, the way the car is moving, and land on both feet.''

She was also taught not to weep over trifles, not to skip when reading a book, and never to tell a lie, even the palest timiest white lie such as many well brought up little girls indulged in quite innocently.

To the child at this stage of her career there were just two things of vital importance, the companionship of her mother and the society of her many friends, the

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people who lived in books. For that matter Honor Dallam's personality pervaded even the books, for she had read most of them first, and never a heroine of them all seemed so spontaneous, gay and lovely as this blue eyed mother who worked eight hours a day at a desk in a dull office. Years later when Sally was living a life far removed from the dingy boarding house, the mere act of taking a book from a particular shelf would recall Honor Dallam.

She would see her mother's oval cheeks, delicately pink, a vivid changeful pinkness, the shining love in blue eyes, the order and symmetry of thick masses of burnished brown hair. Sally loved her mother's hair, loved to see it down, fragrant, curling, curiously alive.

There was one volume of poems that used to lie on Mrs. Dallam's dresser, and sometimes as she brushed her hair at night she would read or repeat a poem from that book. One of them was a perfumed, beautiful thing, all about a bold lover and an old beldame and a wild night of storm, and the rhythm and cadence of that poem used to get into little Sally's blood. No poet of them all could have quivered with more burning joy than Sally when words went gloriously right.

Honor Dallam had in her that same joy, but there were times when she feared Sally would develop into a bluestocking, missing wholly the society of other children. And she said:

"But, dear, the little Andersons are even nicer than Jo March and Hans Brinker and Ivanhoe. Even great books are not as wonderful as living people!"

Sally stopped unlacing her shoe and looked at her mother clad in an old blue dressing gown, with a crimson backed volume on her knee. They were in their big, sunny, exquisitely clean room under the roof, a room rather bare save for the color, the personality and the inevitable dust of many books. That dear disorder was always with them, modified by Honor's passionate dusting. Sally looked now at the shelves, at her mother, at her own small face in the glass. Her smile was impish.

"You're nicer than even books, mother. And sometimes I am, when my dis'osition isn't spoiled by having to learn arithmetic. But the Anderson children don't care a scrap for goddesses or poetry or Sir Walter Scott. They don't know any really *important* things. And they eat all the time!"

Honor Dallam laughed at the snobbish disdain of the small pink face. True, the Anderson children were a trifle unimaginative and perpetually hungry, but she wished Sally could be persuaded to eat more and read less. Yet her long hours at the great desk in the marble "office," made it difficult to order Sally's life more sanely, and on the whole reading seemed the most harmless dissipation in which she could have indulged. In her own life, however, Mrs. Dallam had known intimate and stimulating relationships, and she dreaded the child's developing into a young hermit. Yet even then Fate was planning for Sally her first vivid friendship.

The winter that she was twelve Washington had its share of old fashioned snow storms, and often Honor dragged her small daughter to school on a red sled. This luxurious Sally was an attractive little person, dressed in a brown dress and coat and hood, the sober hue accentuating the brilliant color of her cheeks, the light in her eyes, the gold on the edges of her unruly curls. She was a small girl whom grown-ups contemplated smilingly, other children approved and dogs invariably followed.

One day while sliding down an adventurous hill all by herself she avoided collision with a prosaic milk wagon by a narrow margin. The school faced on a small park and the children regarded this particular hill as their private property during the coasting season. So Sally shaved the milk wagon, feeling justly outraged by its appearance, and then ran plump into an innocent pedestrian. For a moment there was an entangling alliance of long-legged young man, red sled and little girl. Sally looked up from her ignominious position upon the edge of a snow drift and recognized her victim as a newcomer to the boarding house, a tall man with a boy's smile whom the colored waiter called "Mr. Buchanan, suh."

This personage picked up Sally, righted the sled,

stroked an aching shin and remarked with a lift of black brows:

"So it's you, the little girl at the next table."

Sally rubbed a lacerated cheek and blushed as was her habit when embarrassed or pleased:

"Thank goodness the sled's all right. I was so afraid you'd break it!"

Mr. Buchanan laughed. "And I was afraid you'd broken my leg, you and your cavorting steed."

Instantly Sally was all contrition. "Oh, I am sorry," and she sounded sorry. But after ostentatiously searching for broken bones he straightened up, smiled down at the small serious face and remarked:

"Hop on and I'll take you home, Sally Dallam. It'll be safer than leaving you and Bucephalus at large."

Sally hopped, a tingly thrill running down her small spine. He knew her name and he knew about Bucephalus! Though very much grown up and considerably in the way, like the milk wagon, she already preferred him to all the Anderson children put together. Also he walked so fast on the crunchy snow that her curls fluttered and she felt the high excitement which later on many were to experience in a century of speed.

At the boarding house they found Honor Dallam, home for a half holiday, and Sally poured forth the tale of her adventure in words that tripped over each other, while her mother thanked the young man, blushing precisely as Sally had blushed. Buchanan was conscious of a queer biting nostalgia. It was so long since he had had a red sled and a pink cheeked young mother to whom he was the most important person in the universe.

"Now that Sally has catapulted into my life, Mrs. Dallam, I hope you'll let me play with her now and then," he said. "I'm rather a lonely devil and—well, I'd love to have Sally for a pal!"

Speechless, Sally looked at her mother, her cheeks flaming, and Mrs. Dallam smiled at them both, feeling that she cordially liked this young man. Yet even that first day she had a consciousness of a too sensitive mouth, a dreamy forehead with lines already carved deep between far-apart brows. She asked herself whether this was not another of those intense people whom life was sure to hurt horribly. He seemed to have nobody to take care of him, as she meant to take care of Sally. She was perhaps only eight or ten years older than Alfred Buchanan, but already she had fought her battle with loneliness, despair, gray depression, and she felt his hardest battles were still to come. She said:

"And I shall be glad for Sally to have one real live friend beside her book people, Mr. Buchanan. She's by way of becoming a frightful little snob, measuring everybody she knows by the standards of Sir Walter and Horatia Ewing and John Keats."

Whereupon Sally, ignoring reflections upon herself, cried joyously:

"Oh, Mr. Buchanan, have you read 'We and the World,' all about the boy who runs away to sea?"

It seemed that he did not know this particular tale, but he knew intimately "Jackanapes" and the "Maid of the Mist" and "Alice in Wonderland" and Pater's "Cupid and Psyche." Later on he borrowed from Mrs. Dallam a copy of "The Professor" and the little green leather books about King Arthur by a remote person named Mallory.

Also he loaned to Sally's mother a new volume with a bright blue cover which Honor Dallam read most of one night, with a screen shutting the light from Sally's bed. It was a wonderful bitter entrancing book, about strange lands and vivid peoples, by a man named Rudyard Kipling.

CHAPTER II

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ENTER THE ORCHID LADY

THERE is a hoary superstition afloat in the region of adult thought that children learn merely that which they have been taught. Of course it never has been true, for nothing that parents and teachers and schools and books impart to the infantile mind ever plumbs so deep as those truths perceived through environment, atmosphere, the avenues of the senses, and above all through that mysterious sixth sense which defies analysis and yet enriches the inner life of all sensitive children and uncrystallized grown-ups.

Little Sally Dallam knew many things she was not supposed to know, and these were usually the things which gave her the keenest pleasure or the strangest pain. For instance she had long realized that beneath all her mother's courage and gaiety, despite her fresh color and fine health, there often lurked some mysterious sadness. Also she knew that she herself was in some subtle way bound to make things up to her mother, to love her more dearly, give her a more complete confidence than other children gave, lucky children possessed of fathers and real homes and mothers not obliged to be away all day.

This feeling amounted to a sort of secret code. Mother must know everything she did, especially the wicked things, not because Sally was abnormally interested in virtue—perish the thought—but because her mother was lonely and there was no father to pay the bills and help with Sally's upbringing.

For this, however, she secretly considered there might be some compensation. Very early she had discovered that among her small companions fathers were often utilized as beneficent ogres, mothers frequently using that obnoxious phrase: "I'll tell your father!"

Just as she knew Honor Dallam under surfaces and conventions she now commenced to know Alfred Buchanan. He was talkative and gay when he asked Sally to come to see him in his room or to go walking, and yet she felt something somber under his gaiety. She had a sense of expectation, of indefinable dread now and then.

One day he confided to her that Ranger was responsible for his coming to the Ingle's boarding house.

"You see, Sally, I was passing by, wondering where I could live more cheaply than at the hotel which was eating up my savings so fast that the wolf stared me in the face. And then suddenly he was licking my hand, a shaggy lame brute. I jumped, but it was only your friend Ranger. Then I saw the place was some sort of inn or lodging house, ugly and needing fresh paint, but with clean steps and clean curtains in the windows. So I went in and asked prices. If one had to live in a sort of asylum for Lonelies I knew a lame dog who likes you must help a lot. Then I found two human friends—and it's Ranger I'm thanking for them too."

At the moment Sally was sitting on Buchanan's narrow bed nursing her latest possession and the darling of her heart. It was not an amiable doll but a spotless copy of "The Dog of Flanders," a recent gift from her host. She remarked, with an effect of irrelevance:

"Mother says if we hadn't friends the world would be like the seashore without any sea—all glare and sand in your shoes and no compen—you know the word, Mr. Buchanan."

Alfred was sitting in his rickety armchair smoking an over-fragrant but comfortable pipe, and he nodded dreamily.

"Compensations. And I guess your mother's quite right, that she generally is right."

"Why, of course," said Sally, adding unexpectedly: "And she says that there are some people children and dogs just natcherally belong to, and that you are that kind, Mr. Buchanan."

The young man flushed, looked boyishly pleased. From the beginning his special charm for Sally lay in the fact that he never talked down to her, had no vocabulary especially for juveniles. Wherefore his conversation often had a mysterious charm, a pungent flavor. He said now:

"Do you think your mother has a very high opinion of the mentality of dogs and children? Would she trust their judgment? After all even a murderer might have a dog who loved him."

"Mentality" was a new word and a murderer with a devoted dog was a little puzzling, but Sally considered the problem with her small head cocked, her red lips pressed together. She said finally:

"Of course the murderer might be nice when he wasn't murdering! But maybe he had to kill some one, and the dog sort of understood. Anyhow you aren't a murderer, Mr. Buchanan!"

The young man threw back his head and laughed as only Sally made him laugh.

"You did that beautifully, Sally Dallam. And in this queer world all your suppositions may be true. Anyway the last is. I'm not a murderer—yet."

Sally looked a little troubled. "Is there anybody . . . would you like to murder somebody, Mr. Buchanan?"

"Not just now. But I often want to, Sally. Don't you ?"

Sally was nothing if not spontaneous and sincere.

"There was a man who came here once—he had smooth striped clothes and a long thin nose, awfully red and wiggly at the end. He kicked Ranger under the table, hard! I saw him, and I did hope Ranger would bite him! But he didn't. He just growled and came to me."

"Anybody else, Sally?"

"I had a teacher once—oh, years ago. And she said I told a lie—"

"And you hadn't?"

"No. Because Mother says cowards lie . . . so I don't."

Buchanan leaned over and patted Sally's firm brown hand. "I hope you never, never will, dear, that you'll never have to."

Sally considered this. Did a time come when grown people, nice men like Mr. Buchanan, find that they were obliged to lie! Just as grown-ups do so many things which to children are forbidden. It was a crucial moment in the mental evolution of Sally, and Mr. Buchanan saw that it was. He spoke very seriously: "You see, Sara dear, sometimes a grown person gets into a tight place. Your mother doesn't believe in telling tales either, does she?"

"No, sir."

"Well, suppose a man were asked questions about his best friend, and if he answered truly he would be telling on his friend. He mustn't lie, and he mustn't tell tales on his friend. What ought he to do?"

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Sally thought about it, painfully, visibly. Finally she said:

"I don't know, Mr. Buchanan."

Her friend nodded gravely. "Neither does the Grown-up, Sally. And the trouble is that as we get older more and more things puzzle us. We don't know how to behave, sometimes, even when we want to be square and decent. So now and then we make mistakes, do things most dreadfully wrong or foolish. Do you see?"

Sally saw; and if she had possessed the vocabulary she might have explained that this fallibility of grown people was merely one more reason to dread that grim road which leads from the Kingdom of Childhood into the Republic of Grown People. Being a child was so much simpler . . . Sally wished with all her heart that she might remain a little girl always.

Queerly Mr. Buchanan seemed to read her thoughts, as his fingers stroked her soft hair.

"But you needn't be afraid of growing up, Sally Dallam. You'll tell the truth, work hard, and always the people you love will love you. So you're sure to succeed in life."

He said it with a sort of solemnity, almost as though he were promising her something, and Sally was curiously impressed . . . long afterward his words were to recur to her mind as certain words heard in childhood do recur to us all, influencing the men and women we are to be.

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That summer mother and daughter went away for a month's vacation, and leaving Alfred behind was the sole flaw in the crystal of Sally's joy. Her friend took them to the station, helping with bags and umbrellas and tickets, and it was through a blur of tears that the child last saw on the platform that tall, straight figure in the gray suit, a straw hat waving gaily as the train curved from the station into the wide world.

Honor Dallam saw her little daughter's set face with a queer inconsistent heartache. She had wanted Sally to make friends, to care for people outside her beloved books. Yet now the mother was conscious of a sharpedged fear just because of this obvious capacity for love, this dependence upon another playmate than Honor herself.

They spent four splendid adventurous weeks, those two. climbing hills, hunting lacy waterfalls, driving in a wonderful chariot, prosaically called a stage, behind four prancing steeds, only they didn't really prance, but trotted sedately, up-hill and down, with that endurance and singleness of purpose one sees in mountain horses. More than once Sally was secretly entrusted with the reins by a driver who understood the vivid yearnings of little girls with bobbed hair and strong brown hands. and those were wonderful moments. But the weeks passed, and finally Sally and her mother were back in the red brick boarding house, with Ranger licking Sally's hands and Sally looking for Alfred Buchanan. That first evening she did not see him at all, and it was late the next afternoon, after her first day at school-for it was September now-that she ran upstairs and knocked on the shabby door under the roof.

At first she got no answer, and then she thought she heard a sound; surely he must be in, so she knocked again, her own particular double knock. Presently she heard a voice she hardly recognized, a hoarse, queer voice. It said:

"Who's there?"

"It's Sally Dallam, please, Mr. Buchanan."

There was a moment of complete silence, then the sound of a window being opened; finally a voice said: "Wait a moment," and Sally waited. At last the door slowly swayed back. Sally peered into the room and despite the strong breeze was conscious of a queer sickish smell. But she saw a tall lean figure and ran toward it with outstretched hands. Other hands clutched her, lifted her from the floor, then she was being kissed, and for some queer reason found that she was crying.

Her friend, still holding her tightly, sat down in the one shabby arm-chair, his cheek against Sally's cheek, and she noticed that his face was rough. Mr. Buchanan needed a shave most awfully, and, judging by his manner and the look of him, he also needed Sally. After a little he said: "And was it a fine holiday?"

"Yes," said Sally emphatically. "But I wanted you, Mr. Buchanan! And I've brought you something, a present. It's a little purse, made of birchbark. But it will hold your money, you know. I'll get it." She would have sprung from his knee, but he held her.

"You're a darling to bring a gift, but you can get it later. Just now I want you. For you see, Sally, I've missed you, needed you. ..."

Sally sat up straight and looked him over, her cheeks still wet with those unaccountable tears. For the first time she called him by the name he had told her to use but which hitherto she had said only in her shy thoughts.

"Why, Alfred, you're *sick!* Your face is dreffly thin and something's the matter."

"Sally, I was sick. But I'm getting better every minute. For I'm no longer in a black hell of loneliness!"

Sitting there on his knee she kissed him of her own accord, a little kind kiss. Then she sighed, a relieved sigh, and said that now she could take care of him, she and her mother.

"But your work, the work you told us about !-- That you were making to show those people at the Patent Office. Is it finished !"

Alfred Buchanan brushed his hand across his eyes and then looked again at the child's eager face, alight with love and faith.

"Yes, dear, it's finished."

"Well, then-" the child began, but he shook his head.

"I can't tell about it, Sally. I don't know myself, yet. They keep you waiting forever. But you must tell me all about the White Mountains and what you saw and did."

Reassured by his manner and the smile she remembered and loved, Sally talked a long time. They had a happy hour, and before she went Buchanan took her face between his hands and said:

"Sally, you count more than you know, more than you ever will know, dear. If it hadn't been for you—" There he stopped, and the sentence was never finished.

Days afterward he told Mrs. Dallam that the heat of his first summer in Washington had gotten on his nerves, that he had reached a pass where for weeks he had neither eaten nor slept normally. "And you know what that is, Mrs. Dallam?" Whereupon Sally's mother had said quietly:

"Yes, my dear boy, I do."

They were sitting on the stoop that warm September evening. Some of the boarders were away, others were out in the parks; so Sally, her mother, Buchanan and old Ranger had the cool stone steps to themselves. Above them and the hot asphalt street shade trees waved in the faint breeze and the night shone with stars, points of light in a purple sea of sky. Sally and her mother were both dressed in white and the little girl thought that her friend looked very handsome in a soft silk shirt, his white flannel trousers belted in above his slim hips.

"Don't you want to tell us a little more about yourself, Mr. Buchanan?" said Honor Dallam after a long silence. "You know we are both quite safe."

Sally, sitting a little above them, saw his face dimly. It was very still and grave; about him was something which made the child feel he was waiting, and she knew he had been waiting for a long time.

"Yes," he said at last, "you're safe, Mrs. Dallam. I know that. And Sally—I would trust her with anything! But you see, there isn't much to tell."

Honor Dallam smiled to herself in the deep soft dusk.

"When a man is between twenty and thirty years old, unmarried, quite alive and normal, there's sure to be, somewhere, a charming girl able to make him happy, a girl to remember and work for."

Buchanan did not dispute this, and Mrs. Dallam went on:

"Of course I see that being an inventor is a risky business. And success may delay, evade you, flout you, like some spoiled woman. But after all isn't it rather adventurous and splendid, to fashion things from the stuff of your brain, creating as poets and artists create? And when a man has real imagination, when he works as you work—oh, I'm sure it means success in the end!"

Sally felt Buchanan's hand on her shoulder, was conscious of a thrill in the tips of those long nervous fingers, so light and firm and gentle. Then she heard his voice.

"Yes, Mrs. Dallam, it's adventurous enough. And do you remember Kipling?—'He travels the fastest who travels alone!' Just the same *he* married young,—and most men want to, no matter how much they care about their work. They may pretend, or the girl they want may marry the other fellow. But early marriage is the happy, normal thing!"

To Sally her mother's voice sounded a little shaky and queer.

"'Of course it is, dear boy. Normal always, happy sometimes."

There were occasions when Sally thought grown-up conversations rather like the antics of mountain goats she had read about; they appeared to leap from crag to crag, and following them was a breathless business. Now Buchanan said in his quick eager voice:

"Mrs. Dallam, I didn't get a letter for seven weeks! Not a word all the time you and Sally were gone. And I got ill, mind and body. But your return brought me luck . . . my overdue letter came, two hours after Sally found me, and there have been others! So I've got back my nerve, am beginning to believe things may work out right. Only . . . there have been some bad times. And sometimes one leans to the unlucky star theory. You see, Father was an engineer, and he was killed in a mining accident during my Freshman year at college . . . and two years later Mother died. That last year I worked my way, for when all the debts were paid there wasn't much money left . . .'' He hesitated and Mrs. Dallam asked:

"And who got that !—I mean the little that was left !" Sally's friend laughed, a little self-consciously.

"You're on, Mrs. Dallam! I knew you would be before I had time to tell you. Well, there was thirteen hundred dollars, enough to manage on for a couple of vears if I was canny. But you see there was a cousin of my mother's-a queer dreamy absent-minded country preacher with a raft of lovable children. had a farming project that was to make his fortune. aside from his wretched salary from a small church in a Kentucky town. So I loaned him my patrimony-he was to pay me six per cent. for three years and then return the principal. But-he didn't succeed, so of course he couldn't pay anything. I managed to pull through, got my degree, taught for a couple of years, saved a little, and then started in to play a lone hand. I had an idea that I wanted to work out. It was a safety device for an elevator-I got it on the market, and in two years netted nearly five thousand dollars. Then somebody discovered a cheap substitute, but the money kept me going. Last year I began on the thing I've just finished. And if it succeeds-well, in that case T'm made!"

"I suppose we're not to ask what it is?"

"Not now. I'm like an actor learning a new part. Until it's been tried out on the dog he won't discuss it with any one; sheer superstition of course."

There was a little silence, then Buchanan began again: "Mrs. Dallam, the work's all right. I'm not afraid of failing there. It's the other, a fever burning for years . . . You see, as a boy I took all the children's diseases hard . . . they nearly killed me. And then she came, and it was worse than scarlet fever! But when I found that it might mean perpetual indecision, waiting for her, hope deferred for me, I honestly tried to run away. But I couldn't. She wrote to me, said I was no sort of friend, and then things were worse than ever—the fever burnt me, obsessed every waking

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thought. She made all other women seem insipid and colorless . . . you know!"

Mrs. Dallam said in a quiet voice: "Yes, I know." Sally felt her cheeks burn. She wanted to say: "But I don't!" for apparently her friend and her mother had forgotten her presence. . She decided that to stay and feel mystified was better than to ask questions and perhaps be told to run and play. So she sat still on her straw cushion on the cool marble step, as noiseless as a frightened mouse.

Buchanan went on: "Of course I know I've been weak, that a stronger man would have conquered long ago. And I've always believed that women really in love don't have to be perpetually wooed and waited for; is it Shakespeare who says:

Who loves at all that loves not at first sight?

Yet it's easier to theorize and write about it than to love wisely! So I've just hung on, hoped, written, and every little while gone back for a week or so. And sometimes I've been sure that her feeling for me was warmer and deeper than for other men. She can be sweet—I'm no good at description, but there's a sort of wayward grace about her, an elusive charm. Her hair is sunshine and her eyes are changeable, sometimes dark, sometimes yellow, with black brows and lashes. And she's slim, rather small, dainty as an orchid . . .''

Sally's mother patted the sleeve of Sally's friend: "You describe her eloquently, dear boy. She must be

lovely! And what does she like? I mean books, or any sort of work, or outdoors?''

Buchanan hesitated. "Why, I hardly know. She doesn't read, the way you and Sally read, I mean. But she sings, and she dances like a white birch in the wind. Then she wears the sort of clothes that even stupid men notice. Of course she's rather distressingly popular! There's always some new man. But when I go back she makes time to be with me—and we have moonlight nights, in the garden, riding over the hills. The memory of her after I've come back to the city and my work —I live on those memories, Mrs. Dallam."

It seemed to Sally that the silence beat like a pulse.

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Sitting on the upper step, watching the young man's pale profile silhouetted against the darkness, she was reminded of an old rare cameo her mother sometimes wore. Sally, at twelve, felt suddenly grown up; although she could not have expressed her feeling in words she trembled with a realization of suspense, pain, ineffable beauty. Presently he spoke again:

"Of course my work grips—means a lot to me. Yet there's just one other thing that I want, one thing in five years—if I can't have it nothing matters."

Mrs. Dallam moved a little impatiently.

"Yet such caring isn't all of life, Alfred! Even one's work isn't all. Courage, character, friends, these count too! And they count even after one has faced shipwreck of personal happiness. And youth—youth alone is wonderful."

Sally wondered why, and thought that Buchanan said an even queerer thing. He touched with his long hand a fold of Honor Dallam's frock, which had fallen across his knee.

"Youth—yes, but it never really counts until it's gone, until one is old! As to the rest—Mrs. Dallam, you have Sally!"

Honor said slowly: "Yes, Alfred, I have Sally!" And then she spoiled everything by putting out a hand to touch the child. "Why, Sally darling, you're positively cold! Shivering! You must go up to bed. It must be nearly ten o'clock!"

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CHAPTER III

THE UNOPENED LETTER

A FTER that talk on the steps in the velvet summer night Alfred Buchanan all unconsciously played a new part in the drama of Sally Dallam's life. He had been Playmate, now he had become Romance, perhaps the first romance that had ever touched the child save in the pages of a book. She had realized from the beginning that despite his boyish laughter, his affection for herself, he was not light-hearted and careless as other young men seemed to be, the youths who came from time to time to the boarding house, to stay for weeks or months, and then pass mysteriously on into some other world.

He was unlike her mother too, in that he had almost none of those radiant, shining moods which made Honor Dallam a delectable companion for an adventure-loving Sometimes she would come in from long little girl. hours in that dull office, eager and breathless, spots of color burning in her soft cheeks. She would seize Sally and whirl her off for a rushing windy walk straight down Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol grounds. They would climb the hill-Sally and Honor were always climbing hills-and watch daffodil and crimson sunsets, a sky streaming with banners, above the city of low buildings, white and red. There were other expeditions, long country walks in the Autumn, the wind whipping the color into their faces, and in the summer sometimes they took their supper and ate it on some green hillside, or out in the lovely wildness of Rock Creek. In the open Sally's mother was a radiant and shining figure: she could walk and even run as fleetly as a boy. her cheeks would glow and the blue of her eyes become a deeper blue, just the tint of midsummer skies. Sometimes Sally told Alfred Buchanan tales her mother had told her, of a gay and care-free childhood in an old

Southern City with young parents, brothers and sisters, fairy tales by a nursery fire, drives in what Sally was sure must have been a princely equipage, and of a long bright holiday, later on, spent in Florence with Cousin Sally Carter, her mother's closest friend, beautiful, daring, rich. Cousin Sally, it seemed, had stayed on in Florence, having married a young Italian nobleman with an American mother, and after that parting Honor Dallam had never seen her again. Like Byron, Shelley, the Brownings and other true Romanticists, Cousin Sally had died in Italy.

"But first she was my godmother," little Sally explained to Alfred Buchanan, "and she wrote the splendidest letters to Mother for years and years. She wrote to me too. And she was always happy and young, like the people in fairy tales. Mother says even her dying wasn't sad because she loved people and people loved her right to the end."

Buchanan smiled at the small sentimentalist. "Right, Sally. For dying too soon isn't half so bad as living too long. And your Cousin Sally Carter seems to have extracted every bit of honey from life's clover field. She and your mother must have been a great pair!"

Sally's eyes shone. "Cousin Sally was dark and mother was fair, and they went to boarding school together and came out at the same party in Grandfather's old house in Cathedral Street, and when Cousin Sally had her first lover she told Mother about him. They laid awake in the big old walnut bed in the blue room and talked all night! And Cousin Sally cried because she hated to hurt his feelings, and Mother cried because Cousin Sally cried. And oh, it was dreadful!"

Buchanan chuckled. "And they had a perfectly lovely time, Sally! Believe me, they did. Girls always do-when they tell each other about first lovers."

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Sally looked shocked for a moment. She had just achieved the glory and honor of entering her teens, and love affairs had assumed a new importance. And also she recalled that talk on the steps. Surely Alfred was not one to scoff at lovers . . . Yet after that memorable occasion he did not discuss such fascinating topics with Sally, although she thought that he and her mother occasionally had such conversations—after she was safely in bed. But she could not forget the glimpse she had obtained of the lovely lady who looked like an orchid— Sally at this time had never seen an orchid—nor the way Alfred's face had gleamed, cameo-clear, in the summer dusk.

Yet if he evaded sentimental conversation he went on being a splendid playmate, and gradually the boarding house which once had seemed dreary and unhomelike became more interesting, now that they were three. Sally not only grew to love her mother's book-filled chamber but also Mr. Buchanan's little room; from its window you could see pigeons flying about and lighting on a roof near by, and even a tiny far glimpse of the Potomac, yellow as Father Tiber, though sadly devoid of picturesque Romans like brave Horatius.

Then there were the high steps on warm summer nights, and even a corner of the prosy lobby, where Buchanan sometimes smoked and talked to Mrs. Dallam about Kipling and Meredith and what sort of education Sally was to be given now that she was growing up so fast.

With Alfred she had intimate philosophic conversations which occasionally Buchanan seemed to think very funny. The little girl confided to him her puzzling problems, but if he laughed sometimes he was always interested, and always he talked in that satisfying grownup way, without hunting for words of one syllable, as some stupid persons do even when talking to adventurous young Sallies.

One of their conversations took the following turn. Said Sally:

"If Ranger loves Mrs. Ingle and I love Ranger then perhaps I oughtn't to quite hate Mrs. Ingle. What do you think, Alfred?"

Buchanan chuckled. "It's possible that Mrs. Ingle does lack personal magnetism, Sara! But if she's a bit stodgy and dingy minded I'm quite sure she's a blameless wife and an honest woman. And besides wouldn't Dr. Anderson say that we shouldn't hate anybody?"

"Of course. But does he really mean it, I mean for his very own self?" demanded Sally. "You are suggesting that any one can be virtuous vicariously?" asked Buchanan in that you're-as-old-as-Iam voice of his.

Sally took a mental hurdle and came over. Talking to Alfred was rather like playing games of chance; you never knew where you'd come out. Yet somehow she usually "got him," in the slang of a later day. So she nodded and translated thoughtfully for her own satisfaction:

"It's easy for Dr. Anderson to tell us to be good and love everybody, but what was he like when he was thirteen? That's what I want to know! People forget after they get grown up, Alfred. I s'pose they don't mean to tell lies when they talk about how good they were when they were children. They just forget!"

But this time Buchanan took a not-then-invented biplane and soared away into space, far above Sally's ruffled golden head.

"There were seven of them, Solon of Athens, Thales of Miletus, Pittacus of Mitylene, Periander of Corinth, Cleobulus of Lindus, Chilo of Sparta and Bias of Priene. And the eighth is not Greek but American, and not a Wise Man but an Infant Phenomenon. And its name is Sara Hull Dallam!"

At this point the conversation degenerated into a romp which Sally's mother ended by calling her to come and brush up for dinner, and during the next month or so Sally's thoughts about her friend were all sunny and gay. He worked hard on his inventions, and she went to school and learned painful facts—even thus early Sally's specialty was fiction.

Several weeks later came a tiny episode which Sally was to remember. At the boarding house the postman usually arrived about eight in the morning, and one day the colored man who answered the door bell and attended to the distribution of the mail, was "home, sick with malaria," then Washington's favorite bodily ill, especially among the colored brethren. So it happened that Sally took in the bundle of mail, sorted it on the hall table to the satisfaction of even old Mr. Ingle, whose eyesight was not what it had been, and then went singing upstairs, three long flights, carrying four or five letters for her friend. She knocked on Buchanan's door, call-

The postman for Mr. Buchanan!" With almost magic suddenness the door opened and he appeared. Tf. У she had been dealing with the traveling salesman at their table a week earlier, an unattractive person with a bushy black mustache and a diamond scarf-pin and stubby hands, Sally would have said that he snatched the letters. But of course Alfred never snatched. . . Then she saw that those long, flexible, sensitive hands of his were trembling as they sorted the little handful of letters. He sat down quite suddenly, she thought he looked queer, very white, straight-lipped and large eved. The letters all slid to the floor and the child picked them up. then moved close to the sagging figure in the shabby arm He looked shivery and weak, a little as Sally's chair. mother had looked once when she had come down with a severe illness.

"Alfred, are you sick?"

He tried to smile, but his lips seemed stiff. After an instant he said:

"I seem a bit limp, Sally. Suppose you get me some water."

She filled a glass from a pitcher and gave it to him, and Buchanan drank it. Then for what seemed to Sally a long time he sat staring at the letters on the table, apparently without really seeing them at all. Of course Sally knew that the letter he wanted most was not there, and she had a dumb sick pain somewhere in the region of her heart because nothing *she* could do would help. She had at that moment her first realization of what grown folk discover sooner or later, that all the love in the world may be powerless in the Beloved's hour of disaster or of grief. . .

Yet she asked no question, then or afterwards, and even to her mother she did not speak of the episode. Later, years later, she wondered whether, if she had spoken, Mrs. Dallam might not have helped him, even altered the course of after events. By that time Sally had learned the singular fact that we may fight through dreadful disaster and suffering of the mind if only our bodies are sound and well. Scarcely a week later she had gone to meet her mother at the Office and they had done a little necessary shopping on F street and were walking home on the shady side of the street. Though still early April the weather was warm, and the little parks, dotted over the flat city of wide asphalt streets, were brave with color—the young green of foliage, the rainbow tints of tulips and hyacinths, the pale splendor of magnolia blossoms. For two hours Sally had been very happy, as she always was when off on any little adventure with her mother. And then behind them some one called her name eagerly, a voice strong and gay. Buchanan caught up with them, a bit breathless, his eyes shining.

"Sally's mother, Sally, I want to be congratulated! I've found a backer, my machine is behaving like a model baby, and it looks as though my fortune were made!"

There on the quiet street Mrs. Dallam shook both of his hands. Her cheeks were pink with pleasure. "Oh, how splendid!" She and Sally said it in one breath; they both smiled at him and to Buchanan their faces were beautiful. Then he and Honor Dallam talked and Sally danced along beside them, squeezing Buchanan's hand. It seemed that the new invention had won valuable friends, and that the Orchid Girl was also behaving in a suitable manner. She was going to marry him, she had definitely promised. Soon! In short Life had doffed her melancholy mourning and was picking up her fluffy skirts for a gay dance step, precisely as though she had never done anything but dance.

"After all your stars are kind," said Honor Dallam. "I prophesy that soon the Ingle boarding house will lose one of its most distinguished guests and Sally and I find ourselves househunting for Darby and Joan!"

Sally's friend laughed and held her small hand in a elasp that hurt.

"Joan is being really Joan-like at last!—I wired her my success, told her all about the first payment, and what they say about my new baby, and how I want well, all the wonderful things only *she* can give! You see, I've been pretty low in my mind these past few months. There's a new man, recently come back to the old town, and before coming back he made his fortune. He must be forty-five, but of course that's young enough, when a man is rich and well and in love. I've heard about his courtship not from Helen but from one of my old cronies, a chap i went to college with. When her letters haven't come you can fancy the things I've imagined, the Bogy grinning at me in the dark. . . But now she's written all about it—how his success and his personality did tempt her, and how she tried to do the world-wise thing her friends said she ought to do—and found she couldn't! And so we're engaged, and the end of next week, when more of the details have been arranged, I'm going home, for a real holiday!"

"Bring her back with you," said Honor Dallam. "Play the game for all you're worth, and win! Oh, I know you will!"

Sally felt her fingers released, then crushed more tightly than before.

"I've been in love with her so long, Sally's mother! Ever since my last term at college, when I went home and we danced the Christmas Kermiss together; she was sixteen and I was twenty-one and the world was a moonlit garden out of the Arabian Nights!"

That was on a Friday evening. Sally and her mother came in from a long walk on the following Sunday so late that they ate their supper in an empty dining room, with old Mr. Ingle frowning at them and tapping the floor with his impatient cane. Afterward Sally went upstairs by herself while her mother ran over to the Andersons' on the next block. One of the children was ill and as there was a chance that the illness might be infectious Sally had been warned to stay away.

Undressing in the big room under the roof, the familiar room which Sally had grown to love because of the books and her mother's transforming personality, the little girl found herself thinking uneasily about Alfred Buchanan. She had not seen him all day, and usually he made a third upon their Sunday expeditions into the country. So she wanted to know that he was all right. Only yesterday her mother had said that even happiness did not make Mr. Buchanan a very "husky" young man. "I don't like his leanness," she had said to Mrs. Anderson, "that bright color he sometimes has right in the middle of his thin cheeks. He is too taut and eager and restless, though of course that may be just temperament which his profession doesn't modify, as routine work might do."

Tonight Sally brushed her soft bright hair and dipped into that blue volume of Kipling which Alfred and her mother read and re-read, then said her formal little prayers-Sally was very polite to God, very grateful for all the pleasant things that happened-but all the while she kept thinking of her friend, wondering whether he had had another letter, whether he was happy. She knew that there was a Sunday morning mail, when somebody went for it to the Post Office. So perhaps the Orchid-Girl knew this and had written one of those none too frequent letters; perhaps Alfred was working in his room, smiling as he worked. But she wanted to know, so at last she slipped into her small warm wrapper, a new one, brown and velvety, making her cheeks look pinker than ever. She fastened it carefully, made sure that her hair was tidy, then opened her door and ran down the silent empty hall. In the rear of the house she paused, knocking lightly on Buchanan's door. But there was no response although she knocked a second time. He was out then; well, at least she could write him a note and leave it under his door. He would find it as soon as he came home, whether or not the Orchid-Girl had done her part.

Back at her mother's desk she wrote her note. It was short but quite beautifully written, and she thought he would like it.

"DEAB MR. BUCHANAN:

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"I went to see you to say goodnight but you are out. I do hope you have the letter you want most and are very happy. The house is lonesome because Mother and you are both away but if I go to sleep quick to morrow will come soon. Mother read me the story about the Black Sheep and we both cried and I have been reading it again while I undressed. Do you think Mister Kipling ever had such a perfectly dreadful time? I hope you never did anyway.

"SALLY."

She took this to Mr. Buchanan's door and tried to push it underneath, but the space was not wide enough, so after an instant's hesitation she opened the door to place it just within. Then she stood quite still, startled, for Buchanan himself was sitting at his desk. Sally cried: "Oh, excuse me, Alfred," and waited. But the figure at the desk did not move and suddenly Sally found that her heart was racing wildly, why she did not know. Of course he was just busy and absent-minded as grown people often are. She spoke again sharply and formally:

"Mr. Buchanan!"

But he did not answer and then Sally found herself moving slowly toward him, with her heart hammering so that it seemed to her as loud as a noisy clock. At last she stood by the desk, close to the silent form. He was leaning back in his chair, smiling down at something on his desk. By the shaded light just above Sally saw his face clearly: it was beautiful, different, still. The thing he seemed to be looking at was a letter, unopened.

Quite suddenly Sally knew. . .

Hours later, when the doctor had come and gone, Mrs. Dallam held the child in her arms, a white, stern, tearless Sally. After that first moment of realization she had sped through the house, speaking to nobody, then around the block to the Andersons'. To her mother she whispered her story, and while the Rector ran for the nearest doctor-that was before the day of the omnipresent telephone-Sally and Honor Dallam hurried back to the little room so near theirs, under the roof. Together they sat down on Buchanan's narrow white bed, holding each other's hands and waiting for the Doctor. When at last he arrived Mrs. Dallam had taken Sally back to her room, given her some spirits of ammonia and tucked her into bed. Now the Doctor was gone, certain things had been done, Honor Dallam had done them herself, and a tragical hush seemed to brood over the old house. And Sally frightened Honor Dallam, this strange speechless Sally, with wide dry eyes.

Mrs. Dallam said at last:

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"Sally, we loved him dearly, and yet I am glad he died!"

The child moved uneasily but did not speak, and her mother went on:

"You know how he cared, dear, I mean for the girl he hoped to marry?"

Sally nodded; somewhere down the street a clock struck three. Never before had she heard a clock strike at that hour in the still night. Honor kissed the cold smooth check and went on, gently and steadily:

"'The Doctor says that he has had heart disease, probably for a long time, although he may not have known it himself. It seems that any sudden exertion or shock might have killed him, though if he had had treatment, known how to take care of himself he might have lived years. This morning, Joe, the new colored waiter, took up some letters and left them on his desk, since Alfred was out. He must have come in, seen the letter, Helen's letter, and just died, without even having read it !—And oh, Sally darling, that was a wonderful thing, a happy thing !' Mrs. Dallam was weeping now, and her tears fell on Sally's passive little hands.

"You see, dear, I opened her letter. Of course I had no right to, but we wanted to send a telegram and there was no other way to find out her address. And so . . ."

Sally was sitting up in bed now, her hands clenched, her eyes wide open, two sharp vertical lines between her straight brows.

"The letter was signed 'Helen'-and she wrote that she had suddenly married the other man, the rich man Alfred had been so afraid of. He was more successful than Alfred, and she was afraid of being poor. Sally. every line of that letter showed what she was really like, a greedy selfish little grafter, with no real power to love any man for himself, independent of the things he could give her. Of course Alfred never saw this; to him she was beautiful and good. And she must have had a sort of moonlight loveliness, a Lorelei charm, but under her smooth rosy flesh she was hard and selfish, meanly calculating. in spite of her youth; every line of her letter proves that. If Alfred had read it I think even he would have understood, that it would have killed his love." She paused, then went on, speaking half to herself: "But it might also have killed his hopefulness, his optimism, his youth. So I'm glad he saw only her hand-writing,—not the cruel things she wrote. And 1 am glad, little Sally, that it was you who found him, you who really loved him, and that he was smiling."

At last that unchildlike calm was conquered and Al fred Buchanan's faithful friend broke into the passion ate sobbing of a child face to face with grim realism in a world hitherto seen through a glamor of romance. But for Honor Dallam there was one gleam of comfort in her child's dark hour: at least she wept upon he mother's breast, with her mother's arms around her.

CHAPTER IV

BOOKS, DOGS AND ALL OUTDOORS

Y ET to Sally, as to many of us, romance was destined to return, for no matter how sinister Life may seem, nor how bitter its lessons, youth and temperament perpetually make war upon the gray hosts of Realism. In little Sally Dallam, Youth and Temperament were as shining knights in armor, ever on the defensive against the Gradgrinds and Grundys and those who worship King Midas, battling too with those other folk possessed of literal minds, the folk who spurn poetry and jeer at fairy tales and who see in the gleaming winged swan of Science only an old gray goose of limping fact.

That summer following the tragedy in the ugly boarding house Sally spent far from the heat of the city, thanks to her mother's wisdom and also to the revival of a friendship between Honor Dallam and an old schoolmate, once Laura Lane, now Mrs. Graham, the wife of a United States Senator from New York, newly arrived in Washington.

Sally long remembered the first appearance of "Aunt Laura." It was an evening in late May; white and listless, the little girl was lying on her own bed reading a book which Alfred had given her, for at least the fifth Her mother, sitting by the open window, was time. utilizing the lingering twilight to mend her daughter's best brown stockings, now and then humming snatches of old negro melodies which the child loved. And then, upon this homely intimate peace, broke the noise of an eager barking and of a knock on the door. Sally sprang to answer, not the knock, but the bark. It wasn't Ranger's deep rare baying, but a sharp staccato, and when the door was flung wide a beautiful little fox terrier leaped into the room and into her arms. There entered also a tall, dark-eved, vivid person in a long light gray gown of some sort of shimmering material, a person who cried in a voice as eager as the dog's bark:

"Honor Hull, I couldn't wait! That dreadful parlor is no place for us to meet—after nineteen years!"

Sally saw her mother's face, white at first, then a vivid pink, saw her seize this strange newcomer in a warm embrace, while she, Sally, patted the fox terrier and was conscious of a queer pang. For a moment her mother seemed to have forgotten her—and Sally had never before experienced the ignominy of being forgotten by the person to whom she had believed herself indispensable. Then, before she could nurse this troubling emotion that ached like a sick nerve, the dark-eyed, laughing lady had caught her close and was crying ecstatically:

"She's exactly what you were, that first year at school! Not quite so blonde, not quite so pink, but the same eyes, the same smile, even the same brown ribbon in her hair!"

"She's been the blessing that has made every sorrow bearable, Laura—Father's death, Tony's—having to begin all over, fight my own battles. She's been everything a child can be."

Sally felt kisses on her flaming cheeks, kisses and tears, and she knew suddenly, with the fox terrier licking her hands, that these new friends were going to be wonderful. Not like Alfred. Nobody could ever take his place. But still in their own way splendid and near...

Later when she had met the Senator and the children her first impression was not modified. He was a big man with gray eyes and reddish hair and a chin distinctly masterful, its obstinacy modified by a generous mouth and kind eyes under grizzled reddish overhanging brows. He was exceedingly busy, in those years even his family saw all too little of him; yet Sally had a feeling that Washington was somehow safer and more homelike after the Senator had come there to live and help the President govern the Nation.

Just how he helped she didn't know, but she had no doubts as to the efficacy of his assistance, and certainly his own family regarded him as an all-powerful person. There were three children, Marion, dark eyed, slender and gay, to Sally's admiring eyes already a young lady, Jim equally dark-eyed and slender but more serious, with a passion for animals and a desire to mend anything animate which had been hurt, and Donald, physically unlike the others, a brilliantly fair, broad-browed broad-shouldered lad, reticent, quiet, with his father's chin and his mother's smile. All three had unusual height and that look of race characteristic of both parents.

Sally liked them all, was at first most at home with Mrs. Graham and shyest of Donald. But she was soon to have an opportunity for more intimate acquaintance since, when the Grahams went to their country place on Long Island Sound that summer, Sally went with them. In that old comfortable gray stone house close to the water, with lovely vistas from every door and window, and a vast old fashioned garret where one spent rainy days reading or playing games, the little girl had her first taste of real luxury, which to her mind meant enough books, enough dogs, and all outdoors as a playground.

As she wrote her mother: "They are bathed most as often as we are, and they come into the house and we go to the stable. There are four Great Danes and five coach dogs and the fox terrier you met and a darling new Saint Bernard puppy, and they don't just have front names like most dogs but middle names too all spelt out on their collars. There's Robert Bruce and Charles O'Malley and Harry Hotspur and Quentin Durward. And oh mother, they let me name the new G. D. puppy, and it's a girl dog so I called her Honor Bright after you and her own eyes!

"But please kiss Ranger for me on the edge of his shaggiest ear. Tell him I never forget him for a single minute."

The next few words were carefully erased but Honor Dallam shamelessly sought to decipher the bit she was not meant to read, and what Sally had written was "or you or dear Alfred."

Down in torrid Washington, with its beautiful parks and burning asphalt streets, Honor Dallam laughed ٨.

softly, pressed her lips to Sally's letter, and then obediently leaned down to pat her visitor Ranger, and kiss his "shaggiest ear." Her room was under a tin roof, hotter than even the stifling office, and at nearly eight o'clock in the evening it was still humid and airless, yet reading that letter of Sally's once again seemed to make the world a bearable place. Honor told herself that Sally might fail in other ways, but never in loyalty or love, and she knew at the moment one of those strange ecstasics peculiar to mothers. She might be weary and spiritless, sick of the baking city and of the monotonous work which went on and on—Honor Dallam had never been created for monotony—but at least Sally was cool and free and happy!

Honor faced her own broken life, remembered a youth beautiful and joyous yet now obscured by mists of pain, and prayed that Sally might have health, a real education, and in the future the life and the people and the work she was fitted to enjoy. Just how all this was to come to pass Honor did not know, but she believed that her own experience, her sturdy will and fine health, might somehow make for opportunity. There were times when Honor was very tired, conscious of haunting loneliness, for she had possessed and lost, but she was never weary nor haunted nor lonely when she thought of Sally.

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CHAPTER V

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PHILOSOPHY IN A GARRET

YING on the grass under an apple tree, a fat bumble ' bee buzzing somewhere near, the smell of salt seas in her nostrils and the August breeze ruffling her fair hair, Sally Dallam wondered why people built cities, and lived in them!

Yet in her short life she had been so much alone even in Washington that now in this astonishing household, made much of by the whole Graham family, she occasionally suffered in secret from what seemed an embarrassment of riches. She liked them all, oh, amazingly, liked the way they played and fought and read together, teased each other, argued upon every subject under the shining sun. To the only child it was an adventure just to watch them, listen to them, catch the sword play of keen critical humor. Yet now and then she wandered off alone, to think her own thoughts, perhaps to write a note to her mother or read an especially enthralling book, or remember that friend of hers so swiftly withdrawn from her life.

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She was thinking of him now, of things he had said, the way he had looked summer nights on the front stoop, in his white trousers and soft shirt and blue tie, with his hair a little roughened and that smile in his dreamy eyes which came most frequently when he was alone with her. And then—this had happened now for months, sometimes during the day, sometimes in her dreams at night—she lived over again that dreadful moment of realization. Her little body went taut, every nerve keyed almost to the snapping point, as she saw again that still figure, that strange unseeing smile.

As she lay on the grass, the awkward puppy, Honor Bright, licked her clenched hands as old Ranger had done, the rough tongue queerly comforting. How Alfred would have loved Honor Bright, the sprawling, bigfooted, soft-coated baby thing. But that was one of Sally's troubles: whenever she was happiest, when there was a brave sky and a ripply wind from the Sound, a dog to pet, a new thrilling book to read, a pearl and gold and crimson sunset, then she missed Alfred most. She wanted to share these things with him, they weren't *right* without him. She tried hard to obey her mother and not brood, but before she knew what was happening she would be back in that little room above the housetops, waiting for Buchanan to speak to her, with her heart hammering like mad and the whole house incredibly strange and still.

"Sally, what's the matter?"

She glanced up through blurring tears and saw Donald looking down at her. Even at fifteen he wore glasses and knew what to do with his hands, so to Sally he seemed very much older than herself. But she liked his white teeth, his determined chin, the way he always rumpled his thick fair hair when he was reading or thinking deeply. And because he seemed rather selfcontained—not impulsive and downright, like the others —she was shy with him. But now he had dropped down beside her on the grass and was looking off toward the Sound, not at her. And he said again:

"What's the matter, Sally? Tell me."

Sally looked at the Sound, too, and they both lay quite still, side by side, the bee still buzzing and the sunlight making lacy patterns upon Sally's white dress through the branches of the apple tree. At last she said slowly:

"Donald, have you ever—I mean has anybody that belonged to you died?"

The boy plucked a long grass and then another and another, making a chain of many links and still he did not look at Sally or at the tears on her cheeks. And he said at last:

"The first dog I ever owned died, a long time ago. That was pretty bad, though of course dogs have to die before we do. And then Tom Brent—he went to school with us, and he was my chum. He had scarlet fever. I saw him one Saturday—it was in summer, and we'd been out fishing together, and had a corking time. Tom caught thirty fish that day, just porgies you know, and I didn't catch nearly as many. Afterwards I was glad of that—because the next Sunday Tom was dead."

Sally gave a little gasp, and turning, without a word, she laid her hand in his.

So after a little she told him,—not about the Orchid-Girl then; somehow that seemed to belong wholly to the dead—but about the boarding house and Ranger and her mother, and then of Alfred Buchanan and of the things he invented and the walks and talks he and Sally had had together. For the first time she told the whole story of that last night, the note she had written which Alfred had never read, of going to his room the second time, then of that dreadful smiling silence. . .

When she stopped at last she was conscious of a queer relief, as if a weight had slipped from her shoulders. That night, for almost the first time in months, she did not wake with a start or dream depressing dreams. It was long before Sally was to hear the name of a certain much discussed scientist, and of his theories concerning the evil effect of reticences and repressions which our gently-bred forebears regarded as indispensable to true refinement. But she did associate her relieved mind with the quiet youth whose two friends, a dog and a boy, had died, and who therefore understood.

That hour in the orchard, followed by a glorious game of tennis, was the beginning of a real comradeship. Sometimes Don took her fishing, and this was an honor. because hitherto he and Jim had held deep-rooted convictions regarding the incompatability of chattering girls with the peace essential to successful fishing. At other times they spent long hours in the attic together, the rain beating against the tin roof, enterprising spiders spinning their lovely webs from rafter to rafter, the smell of dried fruit and old leather and climbing roses in their nostrils. Those garret smells were curiously mixed and fascinating, for the open windows admitted the scent of blossoming trees and plants and yet never seemed quite to overcome the faint fragrance of old trunks, old letters, old fabrics. There was a huge and still healthy hobby horse, spotted and stodgy, and Sally often read some thrilling tale of pirates and Indians, sitting sidewise upon this patient beast, while Donald lay on a dilapidated lounge near the north window devouring Nicholas Nickleby or Dombey and Son or better yet, The Tale of Two Ciites. This was Don's Dickens' period, but now and then he would stop reading and the two children would have long curious talks.

Once Sally told him something she had been told as a tiny girl, a haunting dreadful thing, and of course true. She believed that if a dog bit you, and a long time afterward went mad, then you went mad too, even though the dog had been perfectly well when he bit you.

Donald knew that this wasn't true, couldn't be true, and he said:

"But Sally, if you believe that I should think you'd be dreadfully afraid of dogs."

"I am," said Sally simply.

"But you aren't! Why, you love every dog we have and they climb all over you and lick your hands and sometimes they'll be sure to bite you, just in play. Any dog will do that."

Sally was sitting on the rocking horse, the Age of Fable poised precariously on her knee, looking off toward the Sound, to-day a mere hazy sheen beneath a gleaming, changing, J. M. Barrie sky. She said deliberately:

"Once a dog did bite me, years ago. Not Ranger, but a little black and tan that a woman in the boarding house used to take out on a leash. And sometimes she'd let me help give him his bath, which he hated. But he got run over and killed, so he doesn't count."

"But the others, Ranger and Hotspur and Honor Bright: Why on earth do you play with them if you think such an awful thing might happen? I'm sure it won't, but then—"

Sally's conviction was so deep-rooted that Don's unbelief could not affect her, but she had worked out her puzzle long ago. She said:

"You see, Don, I do love animals so, 'most all of them, excepting snakes and rats. And it's like this: if a dog bit me and went mad, and then I went mad, it would be awful, but it would be only once! And maybe it wouldn't ever happen, even if I played with dogs all my life. So don't you see that dying *just once* wouldn't be as bad as living to be old and never loving and playing with dogs at all!"

Don was close to his sixteenth birthday, had been promoted to long trousers and was feeling, in consequence, very mature. Yet Sally's philosophy staggered him. He took off his glasses, thoughtfully wiped them on a flounce of Sally's muslin frock, and then put them back on his nose. For a long time he looked at her absently with those contemplative near-sighted eyes and went on thinking. She was a little girl, much younger than himself, really very young indeed. But sometimes she said things that made you feel queer. Finally he said slowly:

"Sally, I kind of think those nutty old philosophers, Plato and the other Greek ginks, might see something in what you've just said. Sounds highbrow, but somehow awfully sensible to me."

Sally was puzzled. Of course what she had said was sensible. It seemed to her a simple and obvious conclusion.

"How do you mean, Don?"

He frowned, chewed grass, and his strong steady hands turned into fists the way they did whenever their owner overworked his young brain.

"Well, if a person got your idea once in his head he'd stop being afraid of a lot of things. He'd know that the very worst that can happen to a fellow is *just being afraid!* So he'd live along and do anything and never really worry. It would be great!"

"Well," said Sally, "that's how I am now. I mean about myself; of course it's different about other people."

"How d'you mean?"

The conversation was getting subtle and intricate but for some reason they were both extraordinarily interested. She said slowly, feeling for the right words:

"You can take care of yourself, or anyway put up with things that happen, Don. But when you love people—" her cheeks were burning and she stared straight at Don without seeing him at all. Instead she was remembering that unforgettable night. She ended with a swift rush: "You don't mind a dog biting you—not dreadfully, I mean; but if the person you care for gets bitten, then—oh Don, that's different!"

Donald nodded seriously, his fair brows kinked into queer ridges.

"'Yes, it is. But you've got to stop being afraid for other people too. If we don't, Sally, we'll have a bad time!"

Sally sighed, waited, finally began to rest her brain by reading about Jason and the Golden Fleece. But when she looked up Don was still puckering his forehead and staring at her through his glasses, that near-sighted look of his which somehow seemed to see more than other people ever saw. At last Sally began again:

"''Course there are books and dogs and garrets. And lovely times for children, like us. But seems to me most grown people have a pretty bad time!"

From Sally this was frightful cynicism and Donald parried stoutly:

"My father and mother don't! I heard them talking the other night. They thought we were all in bed but I was on the upstairs piazza and they were in the garden. It was moonlight. Father had been awfully busy and it was the first time he'd been able to get up. And Mother said:

"'It's even better than it was those first years, Jim! I miss you dreadfully in spite of the children. But when you do come I don't want anything else under God's heaven!""

The boy's voice transmitted passionate feeling, and after an awed moment Sally said:

"And what did your father say?"

"No," said Sally slowly. Then she added: "But

my mother hasn't any garden or any moonlight or any husband! And nobody kisses her but me!''

This was the final touch of maudlin feminine sentimentality, and it finished Donald. He started down for a romp with the dogs, but before slamming the garret door he called back:

"Well, the Lord knows kissing isn't all of Life, Sally Dallam!"

CHAPTER VI

CINDERELLA, TWO PRINCES AND AN ADVENTURE

THAT summer she grew brown and strong and tall. She learned to swim and float and dive, to play an excellent game of tennis, to row a boat and even ride a piebald pony.

And there were one or two of those small adventures which add a zest to life, particularly as they prove perilous.

When they went bathing Jim and Don were allowed to take a row boat and go into deep water always with the understanding that the weather must be calm, the boat anchored and Jim in charge.

One August afternoon Mrs. Graham went up to town for the night and the boys decided to bathe after an early supper instead of during the burning day. As it happened Marion stayed home, having an engagement with a devoted youth who had come from town to take her to a dance at the hotel, chaperoned by a friend of Mrs. Graham's, so Sally and the boys went alone.

The evening was still and vivid, the Sound as unruffled as an inland lake and the sky streaked with color like the gigantic palette of some Titan painter. Sally watched the brothers' long even strokes. Both were bare-armed and bare-legged, the occasional breeze crisping Jim's dark curls and ruffling Donald's fair thick hair. The little girl had a delicious sense of being in the middle of a live fairy tale, a Cinderella with two sunburnt princes and no need for even the most miraculous of slippers.

At last the princes shipped their oars, dropped anchor, and turned to the princess. Their habit was to swim one on each side of her, and Sally had become such an expert that for a short spurt she could keep up even with Jim, who was a swift and powerful swimmer. The water during that long lovely twilight was delicious, the air soft with the breath of pines, while almost a mile away the shore might have been the original "emerald isle" inhabited by the wee people themselves.

The three swam around the boat in widening circles, raced and dived and played about like young porpoises, testing every imaginable stroke, sometimes swimming fast and far, but always keeping close together. At last Jim, the autocrat, decided that Sally had had quite enough.

"We'll take you back, Sallykins, then Don and I will have a last dive and we'll head for home. I'll race you back!" Thus spake the oracle, but Donald's exclamation followed, sharp as a pistol shot:

"Good Lord, Jim! Where's the boat?"

Sally swimming happily, caught the note of consternation, missed a stroke and found herself gulping salt water in a most amateurish fashion. Then she heard Jim's answer:

"The anchor's broke loose, by heck! There she is: I see her. Don, you look after Sally and I'll catch the blamed boat!"

Suddenly the tide was strong and swift, the clear light mysteriously dimmer—all in one flashing moment —and Sally and Don had need for their combined philosophies on the subject of fear. Watching the boat slipping out with the tide, watching his brother's sleek dark head, Don wondered whether Jim was really gaining or losing . . .

Yet to Sally he said in a voice that was almost a drawl:

"It's all right, Sara. Jim's a fish; all we have to do is to take it easy. Now rest a bit, so . . ."

Sally rested obediently, hands on his shoulders, or floated, relaxed and passive. Yet her thoughts were racing, they made pictures in strong color, of her mother, of their room under the roof and of the look of her mother's hands . . . of Alfred, his glowing face that happy day on F street in the sunshine. She saw the spidery wall paper in the parlor of the red boarding house, foolish little silhouettes of faces she knew, the Anderson children, funny profiles against a background of sea and sky, then a glimpse of Ranger, his red tongue lolling, his paws on her knee. . .

She was not conscious of fear, rather of an immense curiosity. If Jim couldn't make it and they were not able to keep afloat there were strange wonders that even a little girl might know . . . whether Alfred were happy now, whether he understood about the Orchid-Girl, and then her own father, what he was like and whether she would know him, and Heaven, whether it would be all white robes and wings and harps, or a deep beautiful green wood, as her mother said Heaven ought to be.

Then she had a swift revulsion. If she, Sally Dallam, were so stupid as to go and get drowned then Don might drown too, trying to save her, and even Jim which would be absurd, great strong splendid boys. So she said between her teeth, for by this time she was very tired:

"I'm all right, Don, truly!"

Donald said nothing just then, he merely gave a cheerful grunt and kept close to her, making her rest now and then, resting himself, forcing himself to think of nothing but the absolute necessity of keeping on, seeing that Sally kept on.

Sally had passed into another phase, the brilliantly colored pictures had faded; now she was conscious that the universe had turned into a gigantic heart, a heart that was beating, beating, beating—she began to count the beats, to count and count . . .

JIM PLAYS GHOST

TO those two it seemed hours, the interminable period between Jim's departure and the instant when they first heard that heavenly music, the splash of oars. Yet in reality it was twenty minutes at most.

Sally never knew how they got into the boat, but get in they did, Jim crossly engineering the job, telling Don to hump himself, that he must get in as well as Sally ... there, that was good, fine. And then, when Sally and Don were safe and gasping in the bottom, Jim carefully shipped both oars and slipped down beside them in the stupor of utter exhaustion.

They drifted for a little, Sally holding Jim's dark head on her knee, Don wetting his brother's lips from the flask always kept in a pocket of the boat by Father's orders, the dusk falling swiftly and the shore receding. Then at last Jim sat up, still dazed, looking queerly at Sally's white face and clenched teeth.

The three grinned sheepishly at each other: for some reason escaping from acute danger always leaves one a little apologetic, secretly ashamed of having taken oneself so seriously. Finally Donald rowed them home, and they made their own landing while it was still light enough for them to see the pallor of each others' faces. They agreed that it would be quite unnecessary to tell their story to Marion or the maids.

In the night Sally woke more than once, and the last time she saw her door open softly and Jim enter the room. The darkness was modified by a late risen moon, and she could see how tall and slim he looked in his long dark bathrobe. Once he stumbled as he came toward the bed, then he peered down at her. Sally smiled back at him sleepily, curiously unstartled, and then sat up abruptly as she saw the queer dazed look in his dark eyes. He sat down on the bed and took her hand, and the little girl realized that he was shaking with some strange emotion.

"I dreamed that Don and I got home, Sally, without you! So I had to come and see."

Sally patted the broad shoulder in a motherly fashion. She said with passionate seriousness:

"Why Jim, it would have been *horrid* of me to get drowned and let them blame you and Don! I knew that all the time."

At that Jim laughed, a relieved boyish laugh. He kissed her casually and affectionately on her small nose, gave a huge sigh and said:

"Gee! What a rotten thing it must be for a captain to see his ship go down—with passengers and crew—and live to get home himself!"

He left her, satisfied and yawning, while Sally cuddled down with a sense of heavenly peace and contentment. She thought how queer boys were: they all hated to be thought sentimental, and yet they were, all the time, and she was glad of it. They might tease you when everything was all right, but they cared. And it was rather splendid, being a girl, with those princely persons saving your life and then dreaming about you afterward.

Mrs. Graham got home the next day, and that evening she and her eldest son were closeted in the library for a long time. Sally, lying in a hammock under the big maple, heard the soft sound of their voices and once caught a stifled cry from Aunt Laura. Actually that lady was experiencing much the sensations Jim had known in the night. She had borrowed her friend's only child, had promised to bring her home strong and well in the Fall . . . suppose Jim had not caught the boat or Don had not been able to take care of Sally all those endless minutes—

Jim's mother clutched him with both hands and their eyes met with complete understanding. The danger which had threatened the boys seemed less terrible to them both than that hideous vision of Jim and Don returning without Sally. "How could I have looked into Honor Dallam's face again !" said Laura Graham.

Jim doffed the cloak of his young omniscience and sang froid. He said in a low voice:

"I thought of that, Mum, while I was swimming for that damned boat, the way you'd feel about the kid. I rather guess that's why I got it. If it had been just Don and me I mightn't have made it."

His mother laughed as he had laughed in the night. "Then it was Sally who saved all three!"

"I sort of believe it was. Any fellow'd be ashamed of letting a girl drown—Don says he felt the same way! Only for goodness sake, Mum, don't talk about it to the girls—what I'm telling you!"

"Of course not, dear. I never repeat the things you tell me confidentially, to any one!"

Jim looked into her bright dark eyes, for the moment a little dimmed, and thought how lucky he and Don vere. Not many fellows had a mother like theirs.

AN OASIS IN A DESERT

THE Sally who returned to Mrs. Dallam in the Fall was quite another person from the big-eyed, thin child who had left Washington in July. In three months she had shot up into a long-legged, sunburnt, boyish person, her cropped hair curling at the ends, her hands strong, brown and calloused by much use of oars and bridle, about her no longer that hint of over-sensitiveness which had begun to trouble her mother. This Sally had been teased and laughed at by two brotherly boys, and Marion had contributed more or less to the hardening process in that she played critical big sister to the only child.

Getting home even to the ugly boarding house had its edge of delight, and for the first time the mother and daughter saw each other with that sharpened vision which separation develops. With a child's eye for externals Sally appreciated her mother's rare coloring, her masses of chestnut hair and the deep bright blue of her eyes. None of the Grahams, not even Don, possessed such brilliance of color, although they were very handsome as to line and proportion. Also Honor Dallam's temperament had the quality her exterior suggested. Her days were spent in a monotony which turns some women into drab nonentities, the luxuries which the Grahams all took for granted,-freedom and fresh air and leisure .--- she had not known in long years, and yet when Sally saw her mother at the station she had a leaping realization that perhaps no other human being she knew seemed so gloriously alive.

And Sally's mother saw in the child a new phase. She told herself: "She used to be all mine, now she has something of her father in her, in her voice, in her eyes, turning from a changeable hazel to a steadfast gray. even in the way she looks at me, half child, half lover!"

Perhaps this suggests the luminous something which people began to perceive in Sally Dallam even then. She was not an especially demonstrative child and so far as sex consciousness was concerned she was at this time rather behind her years. But already she was fascinated by a sort of still hunt for personalities, a search for the right people, boys and girls, men and women, those who were, as she might have phrased it later, "her kind," as eager as she was for expression, understanding, adventure,—adventure not merely of time and place but the far more thrilling adventure of a keen mind among other minds, other personalities.

Sally still loved books, but people at last counted as people should count, and in her narrative concerning the Graham family her mother perceived a quality almost passionately romantic. As Honor Hull had loved Laura Lane long ago in much the same fashion the mother smiled now at the child's eager recital, not so much of events as of her impressions of these people she had come to know and love.

"They have tempers, you know, Mother! Once Jim and Marion quarreled, it was about dogs, whether they should be whipped when they disobeyed. Marion said they should and Jim said they should be made to understand without really hurting them. Jim got so blazing mad that he went out of the room. I think he wanted to hit some one. You see he gets queer when he thinks any one is cruel, and Marion had beaten Harry Hotspur for chewing up her best summer hat. I heard Senator Graham telling Aunt Laura that Jim had an obses-well, you know the word. It means going sort of crazy about something. And because Jim's the oldest he has a kind of feeling that if anything goes wrong it's his fault. That's why he felt so afraid about me that time the boat got away," and Sally told about Jim's coming to her room in the night, to see if she were really safe.

Mrs. Dallam wanted to hear the lost boat story from the beginning and when the tale was told her arms clasped Sally very tightly. "Aunt Laura said it would be worse for you if we'd been drowned, Mother, that she would have had Marion and the Senator left but that you would have had nobody—that you just couldn't have stood it! But I said you could stand *anything*, that you're awfully strong! And that you'd always have books, Shelley and Keats and Kipling, and walks and sunsets. And you would, wouldn't you, Mother?"

Honor Dallam gave a queer little laugh, but her hands gripped Sally's hands, held them.

"'You're a silly Sally, planning how your mother would act if she lost you!" She added after an instant. "But oh. I'm grateful to Jim and Don!"

Sally looked reminiscent, rather pleased. "All the same it was a real adventure," she remarked.

"I can dispense with any more adventures of that kind, Sally."

"But you know what I mean, Mother. It's the way we both felt in that thunderstorm when all the tin roofs were blown into the street and the lightning was all tingly and the rain came in our windows like a waterfall! I thought maybe the world was coming to an end, but it was awfully exciting and we wouldn't have missed it for anything! You know!"

"Yes," said Honor, "I know. What you and I hate most, Sally, is monotony—not danger but tameness," She added in a different tone: "Sometimes that office year after year makes me feel like a thing in a cage."

Sally felt a queer dismay. She said eagerly:

"But you never seem caged, Mother! You always seem more free than the rich people who stay in when it rains, and rock on the piazza! We saw them this summer, Don and I, lots of them at the hotel, women who had lovely clothes, but they couldn't walk or swim or row a boat or anything! And Aunt Laura said looking at people like that always made her envy you."

"Laura Graham envy me!" cried Honor Dallam. "For heaven's sake why?"

"That's what I asked her," replied Sally. "And she said, 'Because your mother is doing what so few women can do, making her own way, facing the world as men do'. She said something else, something about rich women always having cushions between them and all the sharp edges of life."

The child paused, then added: "She wants Marion to have a real profession, just like the boys. So she's going to study shorthand and typewriting and be her father's secretary."

"And what do you want to do, Sally?"

Sally flushed. "Some day I want to live in New York, and know ever so many people, oh, thousands, and write books about them! But first I want to go to college and get a degree and open a school—a splendid school where you can study everything, only it's to be just for boys!"

Whether this conversation had anything to do with what happened next Sally never knew, but to her chagrin and bitter disgust that very Autumn found her no longer in Washington but snugly ensconced in a little room at the top of a big old house in a Virginia town. She had been sent to boarding school, and told: "It's not because I don't want you home, my darling, but because if you stay on here you'll be neglected. And you hate the public schools, hate the boarding house, hate arithmetic! Yet you must get a real education."

That was the root of the trouble, education. Poor Sally began to realize the pain of that process she had always distrusted, the tragedy of growing up.

Yet the miracle was that even this black horror of being separated from her mother and incarcerated in a boarding school, elegantly described as "Fairfax Academy," had its touch of unforseen compensation.

Weeping in her room that first night, the dignity of her years forgotten, and forgotten likewise all that philosophy developed with Don in the beloved attic, Sally was conscious of an awful emptiness in the pit of her small stomach. Then through the gray gloom she heard a surprisingly cheerful noise. It seemed to come from the next room and sounded so like a bird whistling that she sat up to listen. Clear and sweet came that delicate bird note, now sad, now gay, trilling and warbling and tip-toeing up and down the scale in a most alluring fashion, yet always in a sort of musical whisper. Sally dropped soundlessly to the floor upon bare toes and stole to the door between two rooms, opening it softly and swiftly.

In the velvety gloom, lightened by the gleam of a street lamp through open windows, she saw a narrow white $bed_1 = 5$ hot blankets impatiently dropped upon the floor, and a little figure sitting up cross-legged and calm, its head leaning back against bare white arms, hair loose, straight cloudy hair as black as night. From the lips of this placid person came those liquid notes, clear and exquisite.

Uninvited Sally hopped to the foot of the bed and sat down. So far as she remembered she had not seen this girl before, and she asked no questions, merely listened and looked, while the occupant of the bed went on whistling. At last she ceased and after an interval Sally said:

"It's wonderful, like a thrush in a wood, only softer, a sort of fairy thrush."

"It has to be, or they'll come up and make themselves disagreeable—scold us both for talking and you for crying," said the dark-haired little person hugging her knees and staring at Sally's pink tear-wet cheeks. She added: "I saw your mother when she brought you yesterday, Sally Dallam, and she's lovely! I don't wonder you hate coming to the Fairfax Academy for Young Ladies. It's an awful hole. But there's no use crying about it. And my name is Anne Fairfax Dulaney; only don't hate me because I'm a cousin of the Principal. It's not my fault!"

Sally laughed softly, and felt that lift and surge of delight which an interesting new person meant. Even in the dimness she could see that Anne Dulaney was attractive, not just "pretty" but with something fascinating about her round slimness, her dry, soft, raven-black hair, her firm red lips and the wide white forehead shining like marble through the sheen of parted hair. She looked original, daring, a girl who could already love and hate, a girl with a temper, Sally thought, but also a person you could trust. Some day Sally might be able to talk to Anne Dulaney, real talk, about real people, in books and out. ley spoke carefully in sibilant whispers, and it grew tle cooler. It seemed that Anne Dulaney was from hington too, that she was fifteen, that her father was ysician, her mother dead, and that when Anne was safely educated she was to go home and keep house her father, and study music.

want to sing in opera," she told Sally. "But Dad I've got to learn to spell first! You see, Sally, my er is an early-Victorian parent. He believes that an's sole duty is to be cultivated and ladylike and on men!"

ine's scorn for her father's conservatism was Sally's introduction to what later she heard called the nist viewpoint. Anne's worldly wisdom overawed and she wondered whether there might not be some ictive features about this growing-up process. It is esting to note that she went to sleep the instant her

touched the pillow, and that in the morning she ie with an agreeable sense of having discovered aly an oasis in the desert of Boarding School.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE MUSIC ROOM

rno Sally Hull Dallam those years at Fairfax Academy were memorable and valuable not so much for the facts she learned as for the people she loved, and for those other people whom she hated. Even during those immature years from fourteen to eighteen Sally had a dawning realization of the value of contrast. For instance there was Anne: she and Anne guarreled frequently upon all manner of topics, upon religion first of Sally was at this period an ardent churchwoman. all. confirmed by a Bishop with beautiful dark eyes, and long white hands coming out of immaculate lawn ruffles, and a voice so rich and deep that long after that memorable Sunday Sally heard again the strange wonderful incan-"Defend, oh Lord, this Thy child with Thy tation : heavenly grace . . . until she come unto Thy everlasting kingdom."

But Anne, although older than Sally, refused to be confirmed. She said that bishops were just like other men, and that joining the Church before you really understood things was foolish, and that some people thought Shakespere's Plays and Homer's Iliad just as wonderful as the Bible, and just as much inspired too.

To Sally, young and ardent Christian with a passionate *fair* for bishops, this attitude of Anne's savored of black heresy, and yet the curious thing was that Anne's irreligion fascinated her, piqued her curiosity, really gave her a sense of pleasure much like her feeling when, among a grove of slim white birches, she saw one tall dark pine. The birches were lovely, but the somber pine made them even lovelier. So when Sally on a Sunday morning with her hymn book in her hand sang the "Tug of War" hymn in church, or "Abide With Me" to the wild lilting tune then in vogue, she was deliciously conscious of Anne standing beside her, singing too in her throaty

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contralto, but always with a little twist of impish individuality, as though protesting against this business of taking hymns so seriously. To Sally that protest was of the world, the flesh and the devil, yet she found it deeply interesting, like Satan in Paradise Lost. And, if she honestly tried to convince Anne, to reform her loose thinking, deep in her secret consciousness she knew and was glad that Anne would not "be convinced and reformed." For Anne's non-conforming spirit matched the blackness of her hair and eyes, the delicate luminous whiteness of her skin, the dozen ways wherein she differed from the average school-girl type. And Sally loved this difference.

Not people's virtues but their ways of being different, these were the occult charms which worked upon Sally in most insidious fashion. Yet there were some things all people must have, she would have insisted. They must be real, not artificial, wholly sincere, and they must be brave. For all liars, sneaks and cowards Sally had a deep-rooted aversion, much like her physical repulsion for snakes. And this violent intolerance was responsible for much misery during those four years at The Fairfax Academy, for she early discovered that her preference for straightforward methods was by no means shared by the Principal of the School, Miss Virginia Fairfax.

This personage had one thing which Sally was destined to worship all her life, a very fair degree of physical beauty, the quiet, brunette, gracious beauty seen in many Southern women of her time. Many people admired Miss Virginia: her pupils called her Miss Virginia, never Miss Fairfax. But Sally soon found that the girls had no deep-rooted affection for this distinguished looking woman, whereas they were really fond of the gray-haired, apple cheeked Miss Flora Chittenden who taught mathematics and geography, and also of the music teacher, Mrs. Crane, a tiny blonde, girlish looking person who had been a widow for ten years but who could have passed for a school girl any day by the simple expedient of braiding her hair down her back and shortening her neat skirts.

Miss Virginia herself taught History, English Litera-

ture and a strange and intricate something which she called Moral Philosophy. Despite her lack of the thing Sally Dallam considered the key-note of character, a simple and direct sincerity, Miss Virginia was an excellent teacher. For one thing, she had a faculty for making historical characters seem more real than the people passing in the street, and again she had a true appreciation for literature, preferably of an academic and godly type—Miss Virginia was no free thinker like her young cousin Anne Dulaney! If she admired Scott and Thackeray and Jane Austin she disliked with an almost vitriolic hatred "that young cocksure upstart," Rudyard Kipling.

About her literary preferences at least Miss Virginia was sincere. But she had a way of going through the house at night which enraged Anne and Sally, a pussyfooted fashion of appearing suddenly, just in time to hear bits of conversation not meant for academic ears. And the girls were sure that she read their letters from home, while her knowledge as to their most intimate possessions in closet and bureau drawer was probably close to omniscience. Yet in some schools this surveillance would have been justified by a frank insistence upon the right to prowl and pounce. The trouble with Fairfax Academy was that it purported to be not a boarding school at all but a genuine "home." and the girls were supposed to be peculiarly free, save for a gentle and parental supervision. At no time were there more than a dozen boarders-although there were some seventy day-scholars-and this was supposed to insure a personal affection and homely influence for each of the girls who lived at the school, but to these young cynics not the affection and the influence but the prowling and pouncing were the obvious facts of the case.

As Anne put it: "If there were a lot of us and we had a gymnasium and hard and fast rules and an honor system—the way the boys of any good military school have—it would be easy. Nobody hates rules if everybody has to obey, and they don't spring surprises on you. But here a thing's all right one day and all wrong the next. And Cousin Virginia insists upon kissing you goodnight when you want to poison her. I do think it ought to be against the law to kiss a person who doesn't want to be kissed!"

Sally passionately endorsed these sentiments. In fact one of the links in the chain which bound Anne and Sally together, which was to outlast years and separation, was their hatred of so many of the same things. For instance. family prayers-being prayed at or over-and being caressed by a person whom you secretly desired to slap. and being "bossed" unnecessarily about trifles, and being asked questions about your family or personal friends, and being smiled upon by one whose smile you distrusted, and being treated as an intimate by some girl you hardly knew and didn't like, and having your letters closely examined by the authority who distributed the mail, and a thousand other things, small in themselves, but possessing a cumulative significance, in time positively appalling. Yet perhaps it is any form of injustice which children resent most passionately.

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One day Anne was in the music room at the top of the house practising with serene detachment—Anne was happiest fingering a piano or singing—when the door opened and Sally came in, a Sally white-faced and shaking. Anne stopped playing and Sally sat down in a chair near by and looked out of the window. But tears of sheer rage were dripping down upon her twisted hands. And at last Anne said with authority:

"Spit it out, Sallykins! What's my respected and honorable relative been doing now?"

"She's not honorable," said Sally with eyes that blazed in spite of those maddening tears, "she's a liar, and so she thinks everybody else lies!"

"Go on," said Anne patiently, in a voice which was like the biblical "selah."

"You know that thing I wrote about Emerson?" Sally went on. "I mean when Miss Virginia told us we could write an essay about any American writer we liked."

"Yes," said Anne. "And it was bully stuff, the best theme we've had here. But you turned it in a week ago, and Miss Flora corrected our compositions and told you that it was 'unusual'; she even said 'brilliant', didn't she ?''

"Well," Sally went on, "Stella Maynard chose Emerson as her subject this week. She handed her paper in to Miss Virginia, who sometimes corrects the compositions, you know. But she was busy and turned it over to Miss Flora, and Miss Flora came straight to me. Stella's paper was almost exactly like mine, only shorter, words changed here and there. But there were whole sentences exactly the same, and the title, and the last paragraph. So Miss Flora asked me whether I had left my theme book lying around, and I remembered that I had forgotten to put it away and hadn't seen it for some days."

Anne's eyes blazed now. "The sneak!" she said. "I never did like her, Sally, that little Maynard cat. She's pretty but she says mean things behind your back after purring all over you!"

"Oh, Stella doesn't matter," said Sally. "Of course Miss Flora is furious, says she ought to be expelled, that a girl like that is a bad influence. She went straight to Miss Virginia about it, took her the two compositions. And just now Miss Virginia sent for me!"

"Well," sad Anne puzzled, "but of course you are all right! You wrote it first anyhow. And besides you really can write and Stella Maynard has about as much literary ability as a—as a Maltese kitten!"

"Yes," said Sally, "Miss Flora knows that. But Miss Virginia asked me whether Stella and I couldn't have gotten the theme out of some common source!"

"What on earth did she mean?" said Anne.

"She meant hadn't I copied my whole composition out of the encyclopedia or out of somebody's book! She pretended to think I could have cheated like that, I, Sally Dallam!—And she kept on asking questions, talking on and on, insisting that I must have seen something like the thing I wrote, and forgotten it! Imagine stealing six pages of ideas and then forgetting'!"

The two girls sat and stared at each other and at last Anne said slowly: "We're stupid, Sallykins! Remember one thing, the Maynards are rich, Stella takes French and music and every blooming extra there is. And my honorable Cousin doesn't want to expel a girl who's such a paying proposition. So she's trying to throw sand in your eyes and Miss Flora's—so she can keep Stella's dollars!"

"I don't care what happens to Stella or her dollars," said Sally, "but I know what I'd like to do!"

"What, Sally?"

"Walk out of this old school, down to the train and back to my mother, and never see Miss Virginia Fairfax again, in this world or the next!"

Anne hopped off the piano stool and went over to put her soft white cheek against Sally's carnation pinkness. This, from Anne, was an extraordinary and unique demonstration.

"And then you mightn't ever see me again, either, Sally-Spitfire. So don't do it, there's a darling!"

Sally relaxed, her arms went about Anne's slimness and sweetness. They kissed each other gravely.

"I s'pose it's worth it, having to put up with a person like Miss Virginia to get you, Anne Dulaney! But if you weren't here I'd write to Mother and tell her all about it and she wouldn't make me stay either. For my Mother is the most Honorable Person in the world and she knows I couldn't be her daughter and be a horrid cheat. And I hate Miss Virginia's kind of mind—the way she always tries to make herself believe what she wants to believe. It's—why it's not decent!"

And then Anne made rather a shrewd comment, considering that at this time even Anne was barely sixteen.

"But Sally, if every one here at school were as square and fine as your Mother you'd have a terrible time later on, when you're grown up."

"Why?" demanded Sally in her chip-on-the-shoulder tone, a tone she had never used before coming to Fairfax Academy.

"Because," said Anne, "out in the world there's every kind of liar. Father says 'polite society' is full of them. So we have to learn how to get along with all sorts of people, even liars!" "Well," said Sally with vicious emphasis, "I'm sorry to hear it. For I'd rather spend my life in the snake department of the Zoo than live with liars who think you must be one too!"

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CHAPTER X

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SALLY EXPERIENCES RELIGION AND ROMANCE

THE Autumn that Sally was sixteen, after a quite unmysterious and splendid summer spent again with the Graham family, she was the victim for seven long weeks of a secret passion, the tale of which neither Anne nor Honor Dallam heard until the mist of years had dimmed that pristine glory and turned the fabric of dreams into matter for ribald jest.

Sally at this period of her development had grown so tall that it was considered wise for her to put up her hair and lengthen her skirts so that she looked all of seventeen, but at heart she was still the same Sally who had been Alfred Buchanan's adoring and trusted friend. True, her vocabulary was enlarged and her familiarity with History and Algebra and polite Physiology and text book Chemistry and extremely Moral Philosophy all came a little nearer to matching her old eager assurance concerning the heroes and heroines of fiction.

But fiction still claimed Sally's heart-whole devotion. And deep within her glowed that impassioned love for what Kipling had even then designated as "The True Romance." To Sally this Romance became for a time embodied in one fascinating Unknown, a person she saw each Sunday in church, a straight, tall youth with short, thick, straw colored hair, only Sally called it "golden," and it did curl in a way that must have allured many a vulnerable feminine heart. As it happened Anne and Sally had long been separated in the school pew, Sally sitting in the far corner, Anne on the other side of Miss Flora, so this particular person in the gallery above their heads was visible to Sally but not to Anne, or indeed to any other inmate of Fairfax Academy. Sunday after Sunday Sally prayed and sang, knelt and stood and sat once more, conscious of this young Divinity far above

her, and more than once hopeful that she might be exciting as well as experiencing an interest quite alien from hymn book and the sonorous chanting of psalms. It even seemed that the tumult within her occasionally drowned the sound of the organ itself. As I have already intimated during these years at school Sally's religious instincts were strong and absorbing, yet the sermon and service on this particular Sunday were almost unheeded.

For she asked herself whether the gaze of the blonde young man were properly focussed on his hymn book or quite improperly occupied with a girl in a blue dress in the corner of the school pew. The frock was quite new and Sally wore a straw hat with tiny bluebells around the brim, and wonderful white gloves—she had never before owned any white gloves—so for once she was experiencing that consciousness of being well dressed which some pronounce beyond the consolation of religion. But this particular Sunday she knew the satisfaction of being religious and beautiful too, and the double delight gave her courage. She looked straight up at last, to catch full blast the burning regard of two surprisingly dark and large eyes, eyes beautiful, merry, and oh, appreciative, very!

Then and there, in the dim, pleasant old church, Sally blushed, a record breaking blush from her bluebell hat down to the round softness of her white throat and neck under its lace guimpe. Yet fascinated, hypnotized, she gazed straight back into those eyes, gazed and suffered and thrilled. The congregation knelt and Sally knelt also, and he of the intent gaze dropped upon his knees. put his head down upon his folded arms and went right on looking down at Sally over the gallery railing. She should not have seen this, she should have had tightly closed eyes and only the inner vision of her sins and of their miraculous removal, but actually she was conscious of that intent look, of a faint down upon the young man's mouth, and of the wonderful shining hair. Then something happened, something epochal. Still looking at her, unsmiling, intent, he changed his position slightly. brushed his fingertips against his lips. The thing was

done so delicately, so discreetly, that an onlooker might have missed the significance of the little gesture, but not Sally. From head to feet she felt an incredible tingling, felt as though those young lips had actually touched hers, felt *kissed*, there and then, with the congregation chanting the litany. It was a feeling too beautiful and terrible for any words to describe, a feeling beyond tears ... But as she knelt on, at last burying her hot face in her cold hands, tears actually came, and with them an undreamed of ecstasy which Sally thought, or dimly hoped, *might* be due to this mysterious thing called religion.

Yet hers was an honest soul . . . no mortal had seen or guessed the tiny drama, but Sally told God about it, she had a queer conviction that He would understand. But she was none the less determined to keep the whole experience a dark secret—from Anne.

She met him one day as she was returning from a visit to Washington and her mother; she was now allowed to go back and forth alone, the trip amounting to only a couple of hours on a poky train. Coming through the station she saw him, talking to another youth in uniform, and then he caught sight of her and once again Sally blushed, at the burning eagerness of those blue eyes. She disappeared in a flash, hastened through the streets of the little town-it was on a prosaic and depressing Monday-yet Sally felt neither prosaic nor depressed. Instead she tiptoed upon clouds, brushed her fair head against the sickle of the young moon, visible long before the sun had set on that delicious day. She went into study hour after the early school supper with such a radiant face that Miss Flora, presiding discreetly over the dozen girls in the quiet lamplit schoolroom, watched her with wistful eyes.

Miss Flora at this time was plump and near-sighted and fifty, and there were moments when she felt eighty, so far was she from the days of her own romance. For at twenty-four Miss Flora had been engaged to a young doctor, and the very Spring that they were to be married he had been one of half a dozen physicians in Richmond fighting a diphtheria epidemic. He had done brilliant work, had battled tirelessly with no thought of self; but it was in the dark days before the fangs of this monster had been drawn by the chivalrous Knights of Medical So Miss Flora's gallant Alan Deane had suc-Science. cumbed to the plague, and she had joined the noble army of old maids, the hard-working, high-thinking, perpetually remembering old maid who treasures romance in her heart and consoles herself for a solitary life by the consciousness of a faithful if barren devotion. To Miss Flora Sally's face that night was like a blow upon an un-The girl's radiant vitality, her dreaming healed wound. eyes, the color and texture of her skin, her half parted lips, all these told strange things to the little old maid who had missed the joys of fulfilment and self-expression.

Later, as Sally was following Anne from the schoolroom on her way up to bed, Miss Flora waylaid the girl, put an arm around her in a shy little fashion some of the boarders quite liked.

"Did you have a happy time at home, Sally? And is your mother well?"

"Oh, yes!" said Sally. And then something in the little teacher's wistful smile caught at the girl's heartstrings. She had never thought before of Miss Flora's being lonesome; now she told herself that it must be dreadful to teach other people's daughters in a dull boarding school, and that if things had been wholly different Miss Flora would have made a lovely mother. And Sally's conscience suddenly clicked, like a little She had been happy at home, she was always clock. happy when with her mother. Yet that was not what had made the evening, even the routine study hour, a thing of enchantment. So she said, still with an arm around the little woman whom she topped now by several inches:

"Going home is always lovely, Miss Flora. Andwell, sometimes life seems like a garden, don't you think? —sort of bloomy and full of sweet smells, like roses and shrubs and mignonette after a rain." She added, touched by something almost like divination: "You know, Miss Flora!"

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The little woman looked up at the tall girl, the girl wno wrote "compositions" which were sometimes startlingly mature and sometimes incredibly crude, and smiled, a smile strange and vivid, making her face suddenly young and passionate and lovely. And she said: (assuredly a modern schoolgirl would have dubbed Miss Flora "a bromide").

"Sally, you will feel everything in life there is to feel! And you'll suffer, you will know happiness, many kinds of love. But *always*, *always* be sure not to do things you can't talk about to your mother! If you follow that rule you'll be happy and help a great many other people to be happy!"

Sally had a startled sense of being read like an open page. But Miss Flora looked at her so sweetly, so without any sort of suspicion or criticism that the girl leaned down and kissed the lips that had been so rarely kissed in the long years since that brief betrothal.

Barely a week later Sally had occasion to recall what Miss Flora had said. This time she and Anne had done a little shopping together with the music teacher, during the noon hour, and Sally had finished her small errands first and was waiting for the others in front of the store on Main Street. It was a pleasant shady street, at the moment empty, but, as Sally sat down on the steps of the drug-store next door, adventure seemed as far away as that romantic Florence where her mother's girl friend had died so long ago. And then she was facing it—a young man in blue serge stood beside her. He had just run down the steps from the drug store, and he said in a quick eager voice:

"You here! Oh, Sally Dallam, I've been dreaming about you every night!"

Sally said nothing, but her eloquent blood answered for her and the young man felt in no wise repulsed. He went on swiftly, still in that clear low voice:

"I must know you—already I know all about you, that you're at Fairfax Academy and come from Washington. My name is Harwood, Archie Harwood, and I'm nineteen. I'm studying law in Washington but I come home to visit my old aunts, and if you'll just let me see you somewhere, so we can talk . . ." He paused, and still Sally said nothing. Harwood went on: "There's the little garden back of your school, the Daingerfield's garden. They are all away, nobody ever goes there evenings. And if you'll come there, under the sickle pear tree, say to-night at nine—oh, Sally, please come!"

There was a rustle of starched frocks, a little swishing and tapping of heels and in an instant Sally was between Anne and Mrs. Crane walking sedately up the street, and it seemed as though that brief radiant adventure must have been a wonder dreamed.

But all that day, during classes, even during recitations. Sally seemed to be hearing again the young voice. pleading, tender, boyishly eager. She couldn't go, of course she couldn't go, yet it frightened her to know how terribly she wanted to go. And after all if she did would it be so dreadful, just for a talk with this boy who had told her his name and whose face was so open, whose smile was so bright? No, of course she couldn't It wasn't nice of her to want to go. go. Her feeling about it would shock Anne and her mother and her friend Donald if they knew. . . yes, but they didn 't know. And they needn't know, unless . . . For after all love and marriage and happiness sometimes began this way. Look at girls in books, how often they ran off with the hero, and were disowned by proud parents and yet in the end won everybody over and were utterly happy!

That evening after study hour she and Anne went upstairs as usual, and from Sally's window, looking over the little green yard of the school, she could see the Daingerfield's garden, could even see the dim outlines of the sickle pear tree, or thought she could. There was a fence between the school property and that of the absent Daingerfield's, but Sally knew that there was a gap in this fence, and that beyond this gap a path wound, through some old box hedge which smelt sweet and every morning gleamed with innumerable cobwebs made of fairy wire that sparkled like diamonds. Sally wondered if moonlight made that sparkling iridescence, wanted to go and see for herself.

Tonight Anne was very tired and in ten minutes she was in bed, asleep. So Sally at her window felt quite solitary in a gleaming starry world. The house was still, although she knew that downstairs the teachers were playing backgammon or whist, or talking and sewing around the reading lamp. She knew just how they looked, she also knew how easy it would be to steal down the back stairs and out through the deserted kitchen, for old Aunt Polly was always gone by eight o'clock, and then through the school yard to that gap in the hedge.

Oh, it would be splendidly romantic, but wouldn't it also be a sneaky tricky thing to do? And yet how was one to know about people, about life, if one always did the usual thing, played safe, minded those nervous grown folks who were afraid of everything...

She turned from the window, looked at her little white gown and wrapper lying on her bed, then at the bluebell hat visible through the open door of her closet. She must decide, whether to go to bed, or to run softly down the back stairs. Her eyes burned and her throat hurt and deciding things for oneself was a dreadful business. But which should it be?



CHAPTER XI

GROWING-UP PAINS

PELUCTANTLY and sadly, still looking out upon **N**, that enchantment of glamorous moonlight. Sally Dallam undressed in her dim room-she had already turned out the gas the better to see the Daingerfield's garden and the pear tree. At last she was quite ready. and she got into bed in precisely the mood Marie Antoinette must have known when she ascended the steps of the guillotine. Life was over, romance was done, the boy would wait for a while and then hate her for not coming . . . oh, what a wretched, wretched business this being good was, how useless, how depressingly dull. Her eyes still burned and her throat still hurt and she had that sense of being cheated out of something mysteriously sweet and precious. What it was she didn't quite know. not just boy talk, compliments, certainly not those mysterious kisses of first love. Yet she blushed in the darkness . . . how real kisses must tingle if that gesture in the church meant so much. But she was sure that the thing she had missed was not flirting or kissing. It was that lovely dangerous stormy thing. Adventure, glorious as lightning, exciting as rolling thunder, fresh as the fragrance of pines and firs after a summer rain.

It seemed an eternity before she fell asleep, but in the pale dawn she woke suddenly, tingling not from the kiss of a strange boy but from what seemed the light touch of her mother's lips. It seemed to her too that she had seen her mother's shining blue eyes and her pink cheeks and even the little lines and hollows of her dear face, had heard Honor Dallam's low laugh. When she woke her mother had just said:

"Of course I trust you, Sally mine, just as much as I love you!"

The dream was so vivid that she half believed waking was the dream. But she cuddled down among her pillows and the face of the boy faded out. She slept again, this time dreamlessly, on and on, and was most shockingly late for breakfast.

In a way this experience seemed to be the beginning of the growing-up process, and in the end it happened with startling suddenness, as so many things in life do happen.

One day she and Anne were still at Fairfax Academy, quarreling over some problem in Algebra or Geometry— Sally hating and Anne loving any form of mathematics —and then, it seemed only a day later, all life was changed, its problems, dramatis personae, habits of living, everything, and Anne and Sally were seeing each other through the small end of an opera glass.

From being constantly together at school, washing their hair, mending their stockings, eating chocolates from the same box and reading the same new magazines, bought with Anne's munificent pocket money, they were suddenly removed to different parts of a clean shining city, living with their respective parents, hair up, skirts dropped to discreet ankles, addressed by visiting young men as "Miss Sally and Miss Anne," and in some mysterious way expected to feel and act like mature experienced young women.

But the first time Anne took Sally to her own room in her father's big high-ceiled comfortable house on I Street the dreadful ban of age seemed lifted. Sally was nearly eighteen and Anne only nine months and four days from *twenty*, but the girls locked the door and took off misleading frocks and sat on Anne's bed in their "undies" eating chocolate caramels with all the zest of what Sally in sentimental moments called "the dear dead past."

"Now you know, Sally Dallam," said Anne the realist, "that you hated Fairfax Academy, all its dearness and deadness, and that this is what you've been wanting for years and years—to get back home, be with your mother and earn your own living! So there's no use moaning over the melancholy Past! Soon we'll have a new century—and we've got to make good as real people in a real, honest-to-God world! And we will, too!"

As they took stock of each other on this particular afternoon in late October Sally was conscious not only of her friend's appearance and her grown-up look—in hat and frock if not in petticoat and under bodice—but also of Anne's background, the dainty room with its old English papering and its white enameled furniture, immaculate curtains and many books. Dr. Dulaney had been a widower for years but he was one of those men possessed of a share of the home-making sense, and his servants adored him and abetted him in all his plans, as servants rarely aid their mistresses.

Downstairs the house was old and grave but with a distinctive and sober beauty, the beauty of cleanliness and order, of fine proportions, of good simple mahogany and cherry, of delicate engravings and etchings, with here and there a Copley or Stuart portrait of some dead Dulaney, or a plaster cast of the Milo, a bronze reproduction of the Fates, a lovely ivory-toned bas relief of some Florentine youth or maiden conceived in an age of leisure.

"And you belong to it, Anne!" said Sally, with a little thoughtful nod. "It's as much part of you as the old red boarding house is part of me. And yet the queer thing is that much as I love it, and love your father, his looks and his mind, I like the things I've had best, I mean for *me*, the queer little life Mother and I have known together in the shabby room under the roof! I wonder if you see what I mean?"

Yes, Anne did see. If you really cared for your people and your life you wouldn't change them, no matter how queer they might be. It was like noses: you might want a lovely cameo nose yourself, just delicately Roman, not too small—*not* a little snipped-off thing like the nose of a Dresden China figurine! But you didn't want your friends' noses changed; you felt their special noses just suited them, that you loved them a little more because they looked exactly as they did!

Sally said that that was where she and Anne differed from Marion Graham. "She wants to make people over, the boys and me and all her friends, even the man she's engaged to," said Sally. "And she does it too, she's made Don stand straight—he used to be dreadfully round-shouldered—and she's gotten Jim to eat meat, and as a boy he wouldn't eat anything but vegetables, things that didn't have to be killed, and she's even gotten her father to write a book she said he ought to write; he began last summer, and Aunt Laura's as pleased as Punch."

"What did she do to you?" said Anne with some euriosity. Sally flushed, and then laughed. "My teeth were crooked, two in front. And Marion got her mother to send me to her dentist, and now they're perfectly good straight teeth. And then she found that I didn't wash my hair but once a month, and she said I must do it once in two weeks, and of course I do! And this last summer she gave Don and me French lessons, because she said the accent we'd gotten at school was heathenish! ... Oh, yes, Marion believes in making people over!"

"What's she done to her young man?" said Anne.

Sally chuckled. "Well, she's having rather a hard time there. All the Grahams are crazy about tennis, swimming and sailing, that sort of thing. This man she's in love with is a cracker-jack in his own profession —he's a civil engineer, and already he's helped to build two of the finest bridges in the United States. But though he likes long tramps he hates tennis and he says he'd rather have somebody else, *anybody* else, sail his boat! And so Marion has moments when she says she'll never marry him in the world unless he studies law and learns to dance, and then when he goes away she sends telegrams until he comes back. And Aunt Laura says it's a liberal education for Marion, being engaged to Jerry Ashe."

The two girls sat silent for a little, lost in the maze of thought which that word "engaged" suggested. Sally, that secret brooding dreaming Sally whom not even Anne wholly knew or divined, recalled her hour of temptation when she passionately longed to run down to that little moonlit garden and just see what boys said to girls when they liked them ... But if Sally's thoughts were hidden even from Anne that young per son had her own little garden of dreams . . .

Finally Sally finished the last caramel and said sud denly:

"Anne, do you mind telling me about John Hawley Because he's been coming to see you and bringing you Huyler's and books of poetry ever since Commencement and this is almost November. And I don't believ John's a slow-poke!"

It seemed to Sally for the first time in their years of intimacy that Anne actually blushed, the brand of whole-souled, agonizing blush which was Sally's own specialty. And then—this was epochal, for Anne—shiput up her hands to hide the blush and Sally got up from her end of the bed and came and hugged her friend with the utmost solicitude. But curiosity, that old eager desire to know all about Life, this tingled through the very tips of Sally's fingers and made her caress quit an exciting moment.

Anne stopped blushing to cry: "You tickle, Sally,' and then they both laughed, and Sally also was pinke than usual. It was the inevitable moment when man enters the garden of girlhood, not man in the abstract man as seen in dreams, but the young man who is look ing for a mate, the man whom you might marry, if you would, the man who carries the key to unlock a girl' heart, and the question is only: Has he the right key

"Oh, Anne, he's done it," cried Sally, "he's asked you! And what did you say?"

CHAPTER XII

ANNE'S FIRST

A S her blush slowly faded Anne endeavored to produce her usual effect of chuckling a little at Sally, and at the many absurdities of Life.

"You're a romantic infant, Sara Hull Dallam! Not a day older than when you were fourteen! If you'd worked harder at mathematics and read fewer novels, as Cousin Virginia suggested, you'd be—"

"Never mind me," said Sally. "I'm hopeless. What I want to know is how John did it, and where, and what he said and you said. Ah, Anne, don't be a stingy pig! I'm the only Sally you've got, and it's ab-so-lutely necessary that I know all about this terribly pushing person!"

Anne laughed, half unwillingly. "He is, Sally, just that! Wanted to go to Father right away. Wanted to marry me now, while he has a vacation. He's in the real estate business, and he earned twenty-five hundred last year, and besides that he has some money of his own, from his mother. And he's twenty-seven, so he says it's time he married!"

Sally looked aghast. This lover seemed to her almost criminally practical, whereas she had been looking for moonlight-sonata romance, protestations, delicate and exquisite offerings upon the altar of Anne's youth and beauty. And yet—well, the lover who yearned for immediate matrimony could not be damned as "poky," so she said eagerly:

"But what did he say, Anne? I mean first of all? And how did it happen?"

Anne succumbed: after all she knew that she would sleep better to-night if she could talk it out with somebody at once sympathetic and safe. So she sat in the old familiar whistling pose, arms behind her lifted head, feet tucked under her, dark eyes fixed on the Autumnal tints of the Virginia creeper climbing up the porch on th floor below and past her window.

"We'd been to the theater," she began in that littl cool impersonal tone which never deceived Sally. "Th play was that dreadful thing Mrs. Fiske does about th 'Unwelcome Mrs. Hatch,' and I suppose it was fine, only we didn't *like* it. And we walked home through Lafay ette Square and Father was out and the fire lit in th study. So I said he could come in for a few minutes And then I wished I hadn't!"

"Oh, why?" cried Sally.

"Well, he wanted to hold my hand for one thing," said Anne dispassionately. "And then he plumperight into the middle, he said: 'Anne, you know what want—just everything!' And I was so surprised that almost let him kiss me—but not quite! You see I didn' know he'd gotten so far. He told me all about hi income and his prospects and how much he cared an what a wonderful life we could have together . . . h didn't ask me anything, he just poured out the way hfelt. It was—well, it sort of stunned me, so I didn' do any talking at all!"

"But when he tried, what did you do then?" sai Sally with round eyes.

"I said 'Please wait,' and then he went right on tell ing me things, with his hands in his pockets. And h stopped looking at me: we both stared at the fire. H talked and talked, about his family and his mother and father in Maryland, and oh, personal things that I can' repeat, even to you. And I knew I ought to stop him Sally. The fire and his thinking me so wonderful and the fear that Father might come in any moment—the all seemed to hypnotize me. I really couldn't say word. Finally he kissed my hand, said he knew I cared that he couldn't feel so much unless I returned his love Oh, Sally it was a horrible moment! I wanted to die!'

"But you didn't," said Sally. "People never do die when it would be convenient. What did you say Anne?"

Anne brought down her hands with a swift movement shook the loosened hair about her luminous little face "I don't quite know. It was rather awful. But I got it over, somehow, that he'd made a mistake, that I couldn't marry him, that marrying anybody was years and years away."

"And then?" said Sally softly.

"He—oh, Sally, I saw tears in his eyes! And we heard Father's latch-key, and John and he just shook hands and said goodnight. Afterward Father told me that he considered John a very able and promising young man."

"Did you-does your father know?"

"Nobody knows, or ever will, except you, Sally!" Thus Anne, with all Youth's finality and unquestioning faith. For a little while they sat quite still so that they heard a clock tick, and then a moment later the patter of raindrops on the roof. Presently Sally said:

"I don't believe he'll give up right away, Anne. And I can't see why people laugh, stupid people, at lovers who don't get loved back! For I think, oh, I *know* that it must be the most dreadful feeling in the world!"

Anne, being nineteen, was worldwise. So she said in an unnaturally casual voice: "But they always get over it, Sally. They think the feeling will last, and it dosn't, and that's why people laugh."

"But then nothing 'lasts,' Anne. And people don't laugh when a person gets his leg broken, or is run over, just because the pain won't last! And nobody laughs when a person dies. So why do they think it's so funny when a man loves a woman who doesn't care for him?"

"Or the other way round," said Anne thoughtfully. "You know it does happen, Sally. I saw a play once where the homely old-maid school teacher cared for the handsome hero, and that made it a screaming farce! But I couldn't see where the joke came in !"

Sally sat straight, the color deepening in her cheeks. "I believe Jim Graham's right, Anne. People are cruel: they *like* to see other people hurt!"

And then, while Anne digested this, Sally was once more the victim of her own temperamental sincerity and a vein of logic that sometimes surprised herself.

She said slowly:

"Maybe I was cruel, Anne, when I wanted to know all about John—his feeling for you. But now that I do know I'm sorry. And I want friends, oh, dozens of friends, but I'm quite sure that I never want but one lover!"

Anne's pretty shoulders lifted themselves in a tiny exasperated shrug: sometimes Sally was terribly young.

"But if there were only one lover he would probably be the wrong one, Sally!"

And to this gruesome little speech even Sally found that she could make no adequate rejoinder.

CHAPTER XIII

DR. DULANEY SURPRISES HIMSELF

H ONOR DALLAM and Dr. Dulaney had met a year or so earlier, and now that the girls were home and always together, quoting each other's sayings, their respective parents found that they had some things in common, principally, be it said, the psychology of maidenhood. So the Doctor found excuses to call at the dull boarding house, and Honor Dallam talked to him in the little nook where once she had talked to Buchanan, and old Ranger rubbed his head against the Doctor's knees.

"This is the most preposterous place for people like you and Sally to be living," said the physician with a rueful glance at their corner of the shabby "office" and bleak memories of the more dreadful drawing room upstairs. "Just how you've managed it all these years I can't see," and he gave an impatient shrug so much like that little movement of Anne's slim shoulders that Honor Dallam smiled with her eyes though she kept her lips quite grave.

"Well, now that Sally is home it won't do any longer," she said. "So I'll confess to you what even Sally doesn't know—I'm house hunting, and let me tell you it's a disheartening business when one's imagination runs riot and one's pocket book acts as a wet blanket to every pleasant suggestion! But at last I've found something I think will do—a charming little garden not far from Dupont Circle with honeysuckle and mint running riot and room for me to plant roses. And Sally can sit in a hammock and give young men lemonade on hot summer evenings! Doesn't it sound rather pleasing?"

"'Very!'' said the Doctor. "And are you and Sally going to sleep in the hammock and subsist on roses? How about the little matter of keeping warm from October until April?" "Oh, well, there's a house attached to the garden," said Honor. "Only it's tiny, quite negligible. Of course if it weren't I couldn't pay the rent. And even as it is—" she opened her hands with a gesture of resignation and a sort of deprecated recklessness.

"Mrs. Dallam, what are your plans for Sally?" said the Doctor rather abruptly. "I mean if the child must pay her own way, how is she to set about it?"

Honor Dallam looked at him with her head a little tipped to one side, and her blue eyes contemplative.

"Yes, that is the great question," she said. "I've been considering all sorts of things. The possibility of her going to college. Or to a business school to study bookkeeping and stenography. Or for some special training in English and languages. Whatever she does I mean to keep her home for a year or two, studying something, but not too hard! For I want her to have at least a taste of real youth, of irresponsibility, happy friendships, those little joys and pleasures which count so much in retrospect. When a girl misses that sort of thing in her girlhood she never catches up . . . And I want for Sally—well, the best there is, Doctor!"

Dulancy looked at this woman with the clear skin and shining eyes, in her neat yet worn frock of some sort of blue woolen material. He always had an uncomfortable feeling when he faced the facts of Honor Dallam's existence, for Dulaney was one of those men who feel that each woman needs some man carefully arranged as a buffer between her feminine softness and the hard angles of life.

Certainly he never would have understood Laura Graham envying her friend. Yet it was true that Mrs. Dallam made no appeal for sympathy, a fact which the Doctor at once approved and rescrited. Also he knew that she had friends who might have helped her in financial ways if she had been the sort of woman who accepts such help: he knew the Grahams, had heard both the Senator and his wife speak of Mrs. Dallam in the warmest terms. And perhaps he knew too that their affection and admiration were increased rather than diminished by Honor Dallam's shining independence. her simple and cheerful pride. Oh, she was a person. There was no doubt about that. And then, to his own intense astonishment he heard himself saying clearly:

"Mrs. Dallam, let me help . . . Give me the right to make Sally's life, and yours too?"

Sally's mother gave a little gasp, and then murmured: "Dr. Dulaney, do you mean that you want to marry— Sally?"

"Certainly not!" said the Doctor indignantly. "I'm not one of your Graybeards of fifty-odd who rob the cradle! It's you I'm proposing to marry, Honor Dallam."

For the last half hour they had been sitting on the high steps; though it was an October evening the air was soft and mellow. And they were quite alone on the quiet street, nobody within hearing, nobody even visible at the moment, although usually other people sat on other stoops on a mild evening in the Washington of those earlier years. Like Sally, Honor thought suddenly of Alfred Buchanan, of that talk long ago in this very place . . . Yes, that was love, the living flame. And then her thoughts went back farther still, to an old southern garden and a summer night and the faces of a boy and girl under white moonlight. How beautiful the beginning of love, and sometimes how unspeakably sad its ending. But this suggestion of the Doctor's, this exquisite kindness which she recognized as just that . . . what was she to sav?

What she did was to lean a little forward and lay her hand on Dulaney's.

"Doctor, you are very very generous. I appreciate it. But I wouldn't take advantage of that generosity for the whole world!"

"What do you mean by calling me by such hard names. I'm asking you to marry me, Honor!"

"And I'm telling you that I can't and I won't!" she said.

They both sat quite still and somewhere in the distance some negroes sang an old plantation song, a crooning, heartbreaking thing with a long drawn refrain that made you quiver: "Sometimes I feel like a mudderless chile, An' sometimes I feel like I wan'a go home, Sometimes I feel like I'd lay down and die, Then I kneel by de roadside and pray!"

Over and over they sang the queer minor thing, and in the last line there was a strange wild sweetness.

As he listened the Doctor felt with a distinct sense of annoyance that Honor Dallam knew him better than he knew himself, realized his desire to give her love, and his curious passivity. For Dulaney had given all that was deepest and most spontaneous in his nature to the wife who had died fifteen years before. Yet he was lonesome at times, despite all the devotion of Anne, of friends, patients, many human beings who gave him faith, affection, gratitude. He answered the impulsive pressure of Honor Dallam's hand, and said in his pleasant reasonable voice:

"But, my dear, why shouldn't we? You and I are both lonely, both of us have our memories, and we both want to see our children happier than we have been. Couldn't we count more together than we shall apart?"

Honor recovered her hand and secretly gripped herself tight. It would have been pleasant, so easy, to say yes, to accept that kind hand with all it implied of personal and financial safety for herself and for Sally. Sometimes of late she had been very tired, and in her brown hair she had found many silver threads. The monotony of her life was telling, she felt suddenly old, forlorn, incapable of rising to the exigency of planning Sally's future. He could help there, oh, how much he could help! But what about the young stern determination of her early widowhood never to compromise, never to deceive herself or another, never to call a comparatively slight affection by a holy náme? And at last she said very gently:

"Dr. Dulaney, why do we pretend—deceive ourselves? You are fond of me, sorry for me, devoted to Sally both for Anne's sake and her own. I know that. But I know too that you're not really 'in love'... If you were perhaps I might feel differently. I have no final views about second marriages. Sometimes people with enough enthusiasm and personality left may conquer the years; for them love may not belong only to first youth. This *might* have been the real thing. Only it isn't!—"

He rose to his feet, and stood for an instant looking down at her. His strong lined face and his eyes, seeing and very beautiful eyes, like Anne's, held Honor's wistful regard. She did like him so, and Life made so many demands upon you, after you thought you had had your share of difficult decisions and rigid self denials—and then there was Sally. But it was of Sally that he was speaking.

"Have it your own way, then. Only one thing I insist upon—I'm to have some share in Sally, some chance to help in her development, her further education. That much you cannot deny me!"

Honor smiled at him, and her smile was very lovely.

"Oh, Sally!" she said. "You've helped her already, through Anne, in ten thousand ways. And of course you are both going to count more than ever, in her future."

That night in his own study Dulaney smoked a reprehensible number of cigars and went over the interview in his mind. He had thought of himself as a confirmed solitaire, and his own impulse had astonished him at the time, it astonished him now. He was fifty-three, he knew that Honor Dallam was but a few years younger, and he also knew that she had been absolutely right in her diagnosis of his case. He was not in love with her, in the sense that both he and she had known love. Yet with his relief was mingled a curious regret . . . women oughtn't to analyze things, know so much, revert to old memories of romance when they were offered a tempered and tranquil tenderness. It came back to the fact that Honor Dallam was one of your advanced women, she had absurd impracticable theories about the independence of women. She might have even some wild notion that they should vote and run for President. Just the same queer things happened, and money well invested was sometimes evanescent. It might be a good thing to see that all girls were prepared to earn their own bread and butter—in case they did not soon find what was more to the point, able and provident young husbands...

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CHAPTER XIV

SALLY'S EXPERIMENTS

CALLY, an incredulous Sally with shining eyes, stood on a little plot of wet grass and looked at some wild honeysuckle vines, at a single magnolia tree with big shiny leaves in the rear of the very tiniest frame house that Washington could boast. That is, the tiniest house obviously created by and for "white folks," and in the northwest section of the city. At this time negro shanties still occupied some of the most desirable residence lots in Washington, and the problem was how to buy and improve this property without paying the enormous prices demanded by many of the colored people in possession. But the atomic place which Honor Dallam had found was a pleasant left-over in an excellent neighborhood, a really decent pleasing little place, a possible home for those two eager creatures who had "boarded" for so many years and who now regarded even this doll house with absurd enthusiasm.

"It's a fairy palace," said Sally in the solemn tone of utter rapture. "And it will be all ours, a place where only the people we *like* may come—Anne and the Doctor and Aunt Laura and the boys. We'll have Sunday night suppers, and talks about everything under Heaven, with no boarders to interrupt! And oh, Mother darling, we're going to be so *happy!*"

Honor submitted to the impetuous embrace: there were moments when Sally's capacity for sheer joy gave her mother a curious pang. She knew the temperament so well, knew that this abandon and delight were inevitably accompanied by an equal capacity for blind pain. She remembered her child's one grief, the way Sally at thirteen had stopped eating and sleeping, had even been unable to concentrate upon her beloved books for those first long months after Alfred's death.

During that first year in the little house Sally's development was so swift, so almost disconcerting and unbelievable, that Honor found herself at once delighted and dismayed. The girl reveled in the novel sensation of home, unpacking the old dusty boxes of books which for years Honor had reserved in storage, overseeing the manufacture of some simple low shelves for their living room, pushing bits of old furniture into place, hanging curtains and polishing floors. They found an elderly colored woman to cook for them, and Sally began a two years' course in English at a local college, and as she insisted upon doing a fair share of the modest housekeeping and marketing, her days were full to the brim and happier than they had ever been before. For both mother and daughter the satisfaction of little dinners and Sunday night suppers for their friends was out of all proportion to the small outlay. As Sally put it:

"When I give Aunt Laura and Anne broiled steak and tomato salad, with my own mayonnaise and custard I've baked in our own kitchen, I feel like an honest-to-God Duchess entertaining Royalty. And you know, Mother, that the steak couldn't be better at Windsor, or the custards more custardy, or Matilda's beat biscuit more meltin-your-mouthish!"

To the truth of this bit of sheer conceit the Graham family bore witness, as did other friends of Sally and Honor. Not only was the girl meeting many people, making new friends, but she was studying and reading with a zest which had never pertained to her school work at Fairfax Academy. For this was work which led somewhere, work which partook of all the charm which is supposed to belong to play.

The Professor whom Sally liked best was a somewhat un-academic and irritable man of forty-eight who had failed to make a living as a writer of fiction and who had gone into the profession of teaching with an ill grace—only to find himself possessed of an undreamedof gift for inspiring others to do what he himself might never achieve.

As Sally said to Anne. "Professor Byrd makes you hate everything you write—jeers at your cocky little

receipes for a quick success, points the finger of scorn at any celebrated writer whom he damns as 'mediocre'! Yet somehow you find yourself working like mad. One moment you hate him for a slave driver—he seems to wag the finger of derision at everything you do—then when you least expect it, he booms out, so the whole class can hear: 'Not bad, Miss Dallam. Your idea of punctuation is elemental, but the thing you call an essay is an excellent character sketch—the best thing any of my students has done this year!'''

"Oh Sally!" Anne's voice was a lilt of gay pride. Then she added suddenly: "What lucky devils we are, to be studying the things we care about when girls no older than we are working in those treadmill offices, with nothing ahead!"

"It's pretty hard on my mother," said Sally soberly. "But when I talked about getting a position in a department, through Senator Graham, she said that if I succeeded she'd know she had failed! Anne, she has a theory that if people are doing the work they like best they can fight through any old hell that comes! So because I care about writing more than anything else she wants me to write! Can you beat it for sheer impracticability?"

"No," said Anne, "I can't. But your mother is awfully apt to be right, Sally!"

Yet Honor Dallam's rightness and Sally's loyalty and devotion could not blind the older woman to curious tricks that life plays on each generation as it witnesses the unexpected intellectual antics of its offspring. Sally at boarding school had contemplated Bishops with awe and reverence, Sally, at home, nearing the mature age of twenty, was reading Darwin, Huxley, and such novelists as Hardy and Meredith, reacting to these unlike minds in a way that made Honor feel old-fashioned. Sally still went to church with her mother, and as it happened Anne now sang in the choir at St. Jerome's, so that once again Sally habitually performed a religious act and got therefrom a personal reaction not in the least connected with the needs of her soul.

The two girls would walk home together after the

service, Anne dining with Sally or Sally with Anne, and their conversations would hardly have contented the placid Rector and his ardent young associate. For often they dissected a sermon mercilessly with the naïve intolerance of the very young. It was involved and poorly written, or it was illogical, or it consisted almost entirely of quotations, or, if it was now and then a brilliant piece of work from a technical viewpoint, Sally would object to its finality or Anne to its smugness.

Once when Honor was with them, since Anne was dining with Sally that Sunday, Sally said:

"They all talk at you from the pulpit as if they knew things when at best they only believe!"

"Only believe . . ." said Honor. "Oh, Sally!"

Sally squeezed her mother's arm. "You don't talk that way, dearest. You've always been polite and respectful even to my ignorance, given me a chance to talk back, to ask questions. I remember your begging my pardon about something when I was about nine! But Dr. Crawford—can you imagine his begging any one's pardon for anything he'd ever done, or having any real interest in what his parishioners are thinking, their moral convictions or mental processes?"

Actually Honor couldn't. The Rector of Saint Jerome's was too well-bred to be aggressive or overbearing, but he was a crystallized middle-aged man whose power lay in his innate gift for doing and thinking the conventional thing in morals and manners. He had an exceptionally fine figure and presence, and a resonant sonorous voice which disguised its owner's mediocrity as an expensive tactful corset will disguise a figure either meagre or obese. Honor was glad her thoughts were not visible; she was a loyal churchwoman, an Episcopalian by inheritance and conviction, but she understood Sally's vigorous objection to being bored.

As they strolled along a shady path through Lafayette Park Sally said dreamily: "Anne, do look at the way all the young leaves are stretching toward us, like long greedy fingers." After an instant she added irrelevantly: "It's a pity churches and creeds always seem walled in. When I think of God I want to get outdoors. And Mother darling, why must clergymen as a class seem so hopelessly tame? Is it wicked to be interesting?"

That was one of Sally's weaknesses, a demand that life and people should be perpetually "interesting," and on the whole she was rarely disappointed. People drew her, magnet wise, fascinated her. Sometimes charming, sometimes repellant, now and then tragic, each new acquaintance absorbed her as a new specimen absorbs the naturalist. If at twelve she had been an insatiable little bookworm, at twenty she still devoured printed matter with perpetual greed, and at the same time living men and women stood for adventure, sometimes personal, sometimes vicarious, that enticing adventure of the mind compared to which mere travel and place are tame.

She met new people at her classses at the University, a number of young Southerners, some of whom had been to the University of Virginia or Randolph Macon, usually impecunious and ambitious—and interesting girls, eager for that mysterious "higher education" still regarded with suspicion in the South.

Often she brought home her new discoveries for an evening in the little house, and Honor Dallam was hospitable and interested though sometimes secretly amused by what Anne called "Sally's experiments."

There was a youth with a poet's brow and a predatory nose from Baltimore, whose astonishly descriptive name was Shelley Israels. Sally liked him because he worked as she hadn't known people could work, studying at night, getting in attendance at class, yet at the same time paying his way by stenographic work for senators and congressmen—all the while keeping before his mind his fixed intent, which was to become a writer as distinctive as Israel Zangwill, a friend and distant kinsman of his father.

Then there was a hungry little person who wrote sonnets, a youth of twenty-three whom Anne christened "the starved sparrow." His real name was Leonard Reid. He came one night to Sunday tea at Sally's and Anne insisted that he ate thirteen pieces of Matilda's sponge cake. Sally accused Anne of exaggeration. She liked the sonnets and the poet's eager talk. She and Israels and the Sparrow could argue about the relative merits of contemporary novelists and poets until her mother apologetically called down that it was "after twelve, and what would the neighbors think?"

But the friend of Sally's most astonishing to Honor Dallam was a girl several years older than Anne or Sally, a very tall thin girl with hair the color of pale taffy and a waist so incredible that one got an impression that its owner—her name was Geraldine Tait—laced herself to the point of actual peril.

As Anne put it: "Some day she'll break, Sally, and you'll have to glue her together. When I was ten I had a paper doll exactly Geraldine's build, and that's what happened to *her*. She broke smack in two and I had to mend her with a surgical splint in the back."

"The queer part is she doesn't lace at all," said Sally. "I know, because I've seen her in her nightie."

"Oh, Sally!" Anne's tone was a mixture of malice and reproach, but Sally got pink and reiterated: "I tell you, they're natural—her waist and her hair. And she's clever, really clever! She's read everything, knows French and Spanish, and she's taking a lot of extra English so she can do translating for a living. Really, Anne, under that funny reserve she's splendid."

But Anne said secretly to Honor Dallam: "Do you like her, Sally's Mother?"

Honor was loyal to Sally and her "experiments" but incurably honest, and she hesitated for a moment. Then she said with that flashing smile which Anne always watched for:

"I don't, Anne. But she's devoted to Sally, and she has a real mind."

Anne was sitting on the piano stool at the Graham's; the three had been dining with Aunt Laura and the Senator, who were alone. At the moment Sally was buttonholing him about giving work and introductions to her indefatigable Shelley, and the Senator was sputtering forth sundry intolerances concerning that young gentleman's race, which Sally was tolerantly meeting, one by one. Anne went on in a low voice:

"Mrs. Dallam, I don't believe she's straight! I mean

-well, it's horrid to seem to spy, but I can't help hearing things because a friend of ours is at the same boarding house. He told Father that Geraldine's always going about with a married man. And it seems rather awful for Sally . . .''

Honor gave a little sigh, smoothed a fold of Anne's pretty silk frock, and said slowly:

"I've heard about it, Anne. She's made a confidante of Sally. And, well,—she can't do Sally any harm, I'm sure of that, while Sally may do something for her. The girl has no mother, few ties of any sort, and I can't interfere with the one friendship which seems wholesome, when I know perfectly that Sally is always— Sally!"

Anne said nothing more, but that same evening as she said goodnight to the Doctor she kissed him twice, the second time on his respectable Roman nose.

"Dad, I'm not surprised at you—I mean about Mrs. Dallam."

"What do you mean?" said the Doctor rather awkwardly.

But Anne laughed and patted him maternally upon his gray head. "She's an adorable person—and the most astonishing mother. . . But I'm not as bat-blind as Sally, so don't let's pretend."

Dulaney chuckled, pulled a strand of the soft dark hair and said in a tone of resignation: "So long as you keep your observations to yourself, my young Curiosity" As she ran upstairs he called after her: "If you don't want me to ask John his intentions—or any of the others—keep your fingers out of my pie, Miss Anne."

Anne turned on the stair. "Sally's mother is worth fifty Johns, and you know it! You mind your patients, Dr. Dulaney, and I'll mind my young men—and keep still concerning my parent's secret goings on."

"Now how in time did that child find out? I know Honor hasn't talked—how I wish she would!"

So Dulaney ruminated as he left the house for a last look at a very ill patient a few blocks away. His question was never answered nor the subject touched upon again for a long time. Yet the Doctor rather liked to feel that Anne understood. She was not so spontaneously gay as Sally and even to her father she lacked the combination of poise and mellow sweetness which distinguished Honor Dallam. Yet about Anne there was a quiet half-humorous sympathy, a tolerance not usual in the very young. Even the prospect of a stepmother would not make her antagonistic or sentimental, he told himself. But alas! It was the dimmest possibility, far from a definite prospect.

Some time later Sally underwent certain hectic experiences of her own. One afternoon she brought Geraldine home to dinner, and the girls talked for two hours in Sally's room before Mrs. Dallam's return from the office.

The subject was Geraldine's love affair, and what Anne and others merely surmised Sally knew, namely that her queer long friend with the debatable waist and hair was acutely in love, and with a man already married. The situation was preposterous; more, it seemed horrible to Sally. Yet she never for an instant considered repudiating this new friendship: what she insisted upon was discussion, that Geraldine should talk the thing out, see the facts as they were, as Sally saw them. Of the end Sally had no doubts whatsoever for she thought she understood Geraldine, believing her friend impetuous and unconventional, but that she was fundamentally "straight." And in that brief word Sally included many virtues.

"You see," said Geraldine, "you can't understand, Sally. I mean you have so many people to lean on, people who love you, and always your mother . . . she doesn't like me, or approve of me, and yet she lets you have me here . . . which is queer of her I suppose. And very kind."

"Mother doesn't know you, Geraldine. When she does she'll be your friend, too."

Geraldine smiled, a curious smile, just with her lips. Her eyes never smiled. And perhaps those strange eyes fascinated Sally more than anything else. They were lonely eyes, of no particular color, neither large nor beautiful, but just lonely. Looking at her figure and her mass of wheat-colored hair Geraldine might seem artificial, but her eyes were very real.

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She was talking in that low voice of hers, sitting in a shabby old rocking chair and looking out of Sally's window upon the little city garden.

"They won't let me alone, Sally, men. Two have asked me to marry them, of course the type no girl with a brain *could* marry! But the others—they're always after my kind of girl—they care, but not to the marrying point. When my stepmother was living it began she was fast, every one knew that, even Father, before he died. Men were always at the house when we were home in West Virginia and when we stayed on the continent one winter . . . and usually they weren't nice men. . . ."

She paused and after a moment Sally said: "Don't tell me things you'd rather not, Geraldine. They don't matter."

Again Geraldine smiled. "I won't, Sally." After a long silence she continued broodingly: "But he's quite different. Even if he is married he really loves meonly not quite enough . . ."

"What do you mean, dear ?" said Sally.

Geraldine's reply had a tinge of unexpected wisdom. "A man who cares ought to make a girl feel safe, even from herself. But with him I forget everything else, we're just alive! Of course I ought to stop seeing him, —go away. I've a cousin in Chicago, a publisher, who once told me he'd give me translating to do. But Chicago seems a million miles away . . . Oh, Sally, I can't go!"

To Sally also, at that stage, Chicago seemed remote and vague. She put an arm around the incredible waist and Geraldine put her hands over her face. Instinctively Sally knew that she was not crying, that Geraldine was like a man, almost incapable of tears.

At last Geraldine said: "Sally, you shouldn't be playing with me: I'm not a 'nice little girl."

Sally just held her, silently. After an instant Geraldine spoke again, in a low fierce tone: "When he drove me out to Cabin John last week we were together five hours, part of the time walking under the bridge in the still dark. . . It was-well, he kissed me and kissed me-in all my life I've never been so wildly happy. without reason or excuse, just happy! Do you understand ?"

"Of course," said Sally.

"You don't, Sally! Letting a married man kiss you

-why it seems to you perfectly frightful!" "Yes," said Sally honestly, "it does. But just the same I understand."

They were both silent. Then after a while Sally began to talk, to beg Geraldine to go to Chicago to the cousin. "You're big, Geraldine, or you can be. Too big to care for this man. Oh, yes, I know I haven't met him. But I don't care how wonderful he is, he's married!"

In the deepening twilight Geraldine actually began to cry. And her crying was dreadful, like that of some reluctant ashamed man who has reached his limit of endurance. The doorbell rang and Sally heard her mother talking to Matilda. She went down and told them that Geraldine was not well and that she would take her up some dinner, and then ran back to tuck a faded brown blanket about the girl lying on her own little white bed.

Later when Sally carried up a tray she found her friend asleep, the long fair hair loose on the pillow, the slim body limp and exhausted. Sally tiptoed down again, and after dinner Geraldine still slept, and as Shelley Israels called, Sally had to leave her friend for an hour or two.

Downstairs in the little book-filled sitting room the young Jew talked eagerly, telling Sally that he had just received an offer to go abroad with the newly appointed Ambassador to Great Britain. And he was inordinately, verbosely grateful to Sally.

"Senator Graham gave me a letter to him last month, of course because you asked him to," explained Shelley.

Sally was a little dazed. "Why, that's splendid. But I've done nothing really. It's because you're so clever, so well equipped. Oh, I'm so glad."

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The young man with the poetic forehead and the Hebraic beak of a nose had beautiful dark warm eves and they were fixed on Sally now, a long strange look that Sally did not even see. She was talking gaily, but her thoughts flew back to Geraldine, trying to solve that problem, wondering whether her mother would be with Geraldine when she woke-whether the girl would end by telling Honor Dallam what she had told herself. Then Sally came back to the present, to this very intent. excited young man. Shelley was holding her hand, saying queer things.-was the absurd creature proposing? -Sally knew a romantic thrill, remembered that hour when she had debated going to meet the boy in the charmed garden: then the dreadful real present gripped her. He cared, this clever, pleasant, perfectly impossible young man. He was asking her to marry him! And she wanted to disappear beneath the surface of the lovely old rug that Anne had given her for Christmas. Shellev was saving:

"Miss Sally, I won't lie to you—I've made love to women before, sometimes to cheap women, in cheap ways, but I never cared like this. If you'll marry me, go with me to England, we'll be together and we'll both write, there will be a future for us. And some day we'll meet Hardy, H. G. Wells, the big English authors. My cousin knows them. And though by birth I'm a Hebrew we're better off in England than here in America—in some ways. So I believe I can give you the position you should have. You shan't regret it, Sally."

He stopped abruptly, went towards her, for an instant Sally was almost in his arms. But she evaded him, moved to the mantel and laid her hot face against the cold marble. Puzzled, the young man waited, but when at last she raised her head he saw that her face was wet with tears. He said slowly:

"Then I've made a mistake? You don't-"

"A dreadful mistake, Shelley. I never once thought of this."

His face burned. "It's my race! You're intolerant, like the other Christians in this 'free country,'—as bigoted as the Orthodox Jews, with whom I've nothing in common!" Sally said steadily: "You're quite mistaken, Shelley. It's just that I don't care for you—that way. If I did—"

She hesitated; after an instant she slowly continued:

"If I did I suppose nothing would hold me. For I'm beginning to feel that love is terrible."

Shelley looked at her, his dark face intent, his brow beautiful, that predatory look Anne spoke of wiped away by the clean force of his passion. He said quietly with very fine dignity and control:

"We leave in a few weeks and I'd better not come again. But I want you to know I'm not sorry I've known you, Miss Sally. You're what I've wanted all my life—just the best there is!"

The front door slammed behind him leaving Sally with a dazed conviction that outside of books "romance" was horribly depressing.

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CHAPTER XV

CHRISTMAS ROSES

T HAT next morning Sally had a thwarted feeling, and not only because of Shelley. For when Geraldine was gone she had a sense of disappointment, as though she had missed an opportunity. The girl would not speak further about her lover or her plans, if she had anything so definite as a plan in her mind. But she thanked Mrs. Dallam, was gentler than Sally had ever seen her. The next day she was not at class, and when Sally went to her boarding house she was out. For several weeks Sally saw her only in class, though she looked pale and ill, and one afternoon joined her as she was leaving the university building.

"Please don't run away, Geraldine. I'm worried." Sally's voice was pleading, and Geraldine smiled that queer smile of hers. Today she looked more breakable than ever; Sally hated herself for recalling Anne's story of the paper doll mended by a splint in its back. The taffy colored hair in its thick smooth braid, wound about the small head, was brilliant against the velvet of a pert little toque, and on the street Sally was conscious that men turned and stared at them, especially at Geraldine.

Sally said something about the class work, about the starved Sparrow who had turned in an amazingly clever theme which Professor Byrd had read to the class; then she put her hand on Geraldine's arm:

"Dear, are things any better?"

Geraldine always drawled a little; today her voice had its laziest cadence:

"Things usually get worse, Sally." And then suddenly into her reserve there came warmth, rich sweetness; she laughed, a sweet mellow laugh. "Oh, Sally, don't bother about me! I saw him last night . . . he brought me flowers, heavy scented yellow roses. . . he said they were like me. And he took me to the theater; we went to supper afterwards, came home in a carriage. It was like a warm bright dream. God! I didn't know people could feel like that!"

Sally said nothing, merely walked on, her hand upon Geraldine's arm, unpleasantly conscious of the strong perfume her friend always used. And suddenly she thought of Anne, wished she had never known Geraldine. But she did not take her hand away.

They reached the little square where they usually separated; then Sally pleaded:

"Geraldine, don't! Go and get work in Chicago that will mean you'll stop seeing him. Oh, no matter how happy he makes you now it can't last because secret things die—they always die—always!"

Geraldine stopped abruptly. "How do you know that, Sally?"

"I just know it," said Sally.

They sat down on a bench. It was a warm late Autumn day and the tiny park was aflame with russet and pale gold, the air velvet soft against their faces. Geraldine said at last in a defiant tone:

"Well, I don't care if it doesn't last, Sally Dallam. After all nothing does, and it's hot as fire, sweet as a hothouse full of hyacinths! I'm living, living, and I've never lived before. And everything ends so why worry about tomorrow, why talk about virtue, dull duty? I tell you when I'm with him I don't envy any one, not even you, Sally Dallam!"

She turned toward Sally, her red lips curved, her smooth pale face beginning to burn with a beauty Sally had never seen before. Even her eyes were different, no longer wistful, lonely. Sally felt admiration followed by swift repulsion, then a sharp fear. She had for Geraldine a real affection, and Geraldine was in danger. And suddenly the older girl saw that Sally's eyes were brimming with tears.

Geraldine laughed, put out her hand and caressed Sally's hand rigid in its stiff glove. "Sally, you're a foolish, wasteful baby! Go to your friend Anne, to the others who 'belong,' your own kind. I ought never to have told you."

Sally winked back those maddening tears and said in a voice which was sharp and rather fierce:

"You're being so mindless, Geraldine. I used to think you were clever!"

"What has cleverness to do with . . . this?"

Sally spoke slowly, dispassionately:

"I heard Dr. Dulaney say something the other day. I didn't know any one was in his office and I don't know now who it was. Of course I ran up to Anne's room, but not before catching that scrap . . . he said: 'A woman not actually subnormal *has* to be good . . . nobody with an intellect can fail to see that it's always the woman who pays. Most derelicts are morons; every doctor knows that.'"

"What on earth's a 'moron'?" said Geraldine. "I don't know the word."

"Anne found it in a medical dictionary. It means a person whose mind never develops beyond adolescence."

Geraldine laughed. "Do you mean to tell me I'm a "moron," Sally Dallam?"

"If you prefer I'll call you just a plain fool, Geraldine!"

They faced each other defiantly, and Sally's eyes were dry, her chin set obstinately. Geraldine had never seen this particular Sally. They parted rather abruptly and for weeks their relation was purely formal. Sally wrote one careful letter which remained unanswered; Geraldine obviously avoided her. At first Sally worried, lost sleep, until deliberately she crowded her life so full that Geraldine seemed lost under the piled up interests.

It was about this time that Don's letters from college grew especially satisfying. His friendship was a delight, even during their long months of separation. He wrote of his work, of his plans for the future, of his room-mate, Geoffrey Kent:

"He's a queer chap, Sally, lean, rather shabby, a bit older than the rest of us, with ideas to burn and no money. His course is engineering, but he says engineers are narrow-gauged, one-idead—that what he wants is not a blank wall but a 'figured tapestry background.' Where he gets this tapestry bug the Lord only knows.''

Later Don added:

"I've found out more about Geoff, that his mother was an artist, awfully clever, did mural work and poetry that Harper's published, the real thing. I've read some of it in old magazines, and the lilt of her verse would make you tingle. When she married Geoff's father they were both ambitious, but they had almost no money, and then Geoff came. When he was eleven his father died of pneumonia and his mother stopped writing and painting because she said she couldn't educate him on poetry. She got a position in a private school, taught drawing, between times designed posters for advertising firms. So she sent Geoff to the best schools, prepared him for Tech. Then she died-after being ill just twenty-four hours-Geoff didn't see her to say goodbye. He has a frozen look when he thinks about her. You know he's remembering all she did for him. all he wanted to do for her, hating death for cheating him of his opportunity. ... But ambitious ... he wants the moon, wants to make his name famous, since he's her son and it's her name too! Yet there's something square and clean about him. He'll never arrive at a goal over men's prostrate bodies, like those old chariot-racing chaps. Even Jim couldn't find in Geoff what he says most people have—a streak of devilish crueltv!"

Another time he wrote:

"You know, Sally, I sometimes wonder if it's good for a fellow to spend years of his life in a university where there's not a woman to speak to— That sort of thing either makes women seem too rare or too common... I think boys need women and girls need men, that living just with one's own sex is crippling.... Which is where your letters come in—They're like fresh green woods after acres of ploughed ground! Your very handwriting is refreshing, the way you make your t's and d's!" He added in a postscript: "I'm keen for you and Geoff to meet. You'll make him sit up and stare because he knows mighty little about girls, and you'll like things he says. For instance, 'Some fellows keep decent not because they're naturally virtuous but because vice is so darned ugly—like fat people in bathing suits!""

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Yes, Sally thought she would like him, and later Geoffrey Kent came to Washington for the Christmas holidays, and the girls found him a little queer, a little shy, yet by no means dull. To Jim and Mrs. Graham he was especially interesting, in fact Don confided to Sally with complete satisfaction: "I think old Jim's cut me out with Geoff; they're thick as thieves. And Mother likes that keen mind of his right up to the hilt. But Marion wants to interest him in a proper appreciation of the value of clothes. She says he would be handsome if his trousers fitted and his collars were higher and he remembered to have his hair cut oftener."

Sally chuckled. Marion's passion for altering people, their appearance, manners, habits and viewpoint, had merely gathered force with the years. Yet when Sally met Geoffrey Kent she confessed to herself that Marion was right, as usual, although this rightness was not always an endearing quality. Kent arrested one's attention, piqued one's curiosity, appealed to one's intellectual appreciation. Yet he was a little disconcerting now and then,-his abruptness, the way his thick dark hair brooded over his extremely low collars, the fact that his trousers and coats usually had a sort of shrunken look, as though he bought them ready-made and outgrew them over night. But Sally liked the effect of clean long lines, the look of physical endurance, and certain qualities which suggested that gifted mother of his. His brown hair was fine, his wrists and ankles slender. his eyelids beautifully carved, while the straight regard of his deep-set eves was curiously revealing.

It was Christmas Eve; the Graham dinner table was decorated with a miniature tree, all soft colors and delicate lights, while at each place was a rose, white for the men, crimson for the women. As Sally turned toward Donald's chum she met eyes that smiled at her as few eyes know how to smile, and Geoffrey Kent laid his rose beside hers.

"Wear them both, won't you? And don't you think the union is a lucky sign, for our friendship?"

Sally slipped the two roses under the clasp of her bar pin so that they lay bright and delicate against her white crêpe dress. With her bare neck and arms, the bright touch of color on her breast and the deep glowing warmth of her lips and cheeks, she was tonight as lovely and all-promising as the school girl Miss Flora had loved and envied and warned. But she had not caught the drift of his allusion and shrugged laughingly at her "stupidity."

He smiled: "The union of York and Lancaster, that's all I meant—awfully stale comparison, under the circumstances—" he broke off; his eyes finished his sentence rather eloquently. Sally realized that after all he was older than the rest of them and that mentally he was not in the least crude. She was conscious of surprise edged with shyness. As they talked she knew that she liked him, feeling a delicate feminine pleasure in giving him pleasure.

Apparently he had read voraciously, Balzac, Zola, Turgenieff, such great Englishmen as Meredith, Hardy, Kipling and H. G. Wells.

He talked a good deal about Don. "He has talent, Miss Sally. He's going to be a fine architect, and luckily he didn't study law to please the Senator; he came near it, you know, but it seems Mrs. Graham came to the rescue."

"She would," said Sally. "Aunt Laura never sacrifices one person to another. But the Senator was fine about both Jim and Don—when he found that they knew what they wanted. Neither of them was cut out for law, though I do think Don would make a corking judge—if one could just begin on the bench."

They both laughed and looked at Don across the table, talking to Anne about Italy. Geoffrey said:

"We hope he'll get the scholarship, which may mean Rome—though it's too soon to know yet."

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Sally's eyes widened, her color rose. "Oh, if he just does!" she cried. Then she looked at the cleareyed young man beside her and said suddenly:

"But you,—what do you want to do, Geoffrey Kent? You aren't like any of the engineers I've known—you're too keen about books, people, ideas . . . Most engineers want a pocket compass—to build bridges and tunnel under mountains. What do they care about red and white roses, Richard Feverel and Jude The Obscure!"

At this point a toast was proposed, somebody made an impromptu speech and then everybody adjourned to the library for coffee. Later Anne was asked to sing and most of the party drifted to the drawing room, but Sally and Kent stayed on by the library fire.

"What do I want to do?" he echoed, smoking a meditative pipe in a mature fashion that reminded Sally of Dr. Dulaney. There was a look of contemplative enjoyment on his finely modelled face. They both watched the flames leaping, recoiling; listened to the wild wind outside . . . It was a night for a pipe and a fire and intimate talk. And their talk ranged wide . . . he told her many things. What Geoffrey Kent did not tell Sally was his impression of this girl friend of Don's. He thought her the loveliest thing he had ever seen, told himself she reminded him of a little peach tree in full bloom against a background of sombre pines, a memory of his childhood home in Kentucky.

At last he said deliberately:

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"Miss Sally Dallam, you answer a riddle which has always puzzled me."

"Aren't you rather enigmatic, Mr. Geoffrey Kent?" But he went on earnestly:

"I mean I know now why Don writes to you as regularly as he winds his watch, why he always reaches any given point by way of Washington!"

"I don't just see?" She did not blush and was obviously puzzled.

"But I do! Don knows that you make a fellow think, stimulate him, and there are so many pretty girls who don't do that. Instead they just prick you with their little sharp needle minds!" He paused, seeking adequate words in which to clothe his thought. "After all, there are only two kinds of people in the world, big and little. The little ones may possess all the virtues and keep all the commandments, but they remain little, while the big ones may break laws and commit crimes and are still big!"

"Are you intimating that I have a pricking needle mind? I'd so much rather be 'big,"—with crimes to my credit!"

He laughed at her tone, but added gravely: "Personalities, compliments, are not my specialty, Miss Sally. I shan't offend again!"

"But you haven't offended! And oh, you're right about the two kinds of people."

They sat for a while in a companionable silence, broken only by the crackling of the fire, the eerie shriek of the wind. Deep within her Sally felt something of that delicate wild delight she had known in the old church, when the unknown boy in the gallery had watched her. Yet her happiness to-night seemed mental rather than personal, and underneath her surface mood she could not forget Geraldine.

She learned that Kent wanted to write, had already published sketches and stories in a college magazine. This made him seem mature, important, stimulated her own growing ambition. She told him about Byrd, her course at the University, about the Sparrow's occasional successes, about some verses she had written and which had actually come out in a small town newspaper.

"When I saw myself in print I felt like Keats," she laughed.

Just then Anne's rich mezzo-soprano soared, something birdlike still in its liquid modulations, yet human, heart-warming, joyous.

Donald came into the room, put a log on the fire, smiled at his friends:

"I left Jim to turn Anne's music, with John glowering from his corner, and all the others settled in sentimental listening poses. You two . . . Glory, but it's fine to have you here together, to feel that you both 'see why.'" "I do," said Geoff promptly.

Donald put his hand in his pocket. "Your mother asked me to bring you this, Sally. She forgot to give it to you, thinks you may want to read it now."

It was a letter, and from Geraldine. Sally had again that pricking fear which she had deliberately crushed down for days. She said to the two young men: "If you don't mind I'll just see . . ."

It was the merest note. She caught the sense in one swift glance.

"Sally, I'm going, before it's too late, to Chicago. Whether we'll ever meet again, you and I, only God knows, and He's not telling. I'm giving him up not because I'm afraid of being a 'moron',—though that was clever of you, Sally!—but because I keep remembering that you've cared, really cared—so few people have for me—and that you actually cried over me, you blessed little goose!"

Sally crushed the note in her hand, her eyes blazed. She knew that now she could be completely happy! And she had a sudden respect for her own instinct; she couldn't call it judgment. Nobody else had wholly liked or trusted Geraldine, but Sally felt that her affection was justified. She would write to her tomorrow.

Don and Geoffrey had been talking aside; now Don said: "Sally, you look like a child staring at its first Christmas tree—hypnotized by the lights and the be-autiful dolls. I gather that your letter brought good news."

She looked up, nodded, and just then Anne in the drawing room caught a high note, slid down the scale with airy lightness, hovering upon the brink of some ineffable sadness. In that hesitant minor chord joy and sorrow seemed to blend, delicate hopes, brooding fears, and beauty, inpalpable, evanescent.

Sally felt as though Geraldine were in the room, wanted to touch her, feared her own mood, and just then a vast handkerchief dropped upon her knee. She caught it, wiped her eyes surreptitiously, knowing that its owner was not looking at her—which was exactly like the boy Don.

Later she dreamily watched the faces of the two young

men, contrasting as sharply as their lives had contrasted. In one was humor, fine artistic perception, boyish gaiety deepening under her eyes into a thoughtful contentment. In the other Sally divined a hungry yearning despite the broad brow and resolute jaw. She wondered what life would bring them all. . . .

Anne was singing again, a lilting heart-lifting thing, touched with mystery, edged with golden hope. Then Sally knew, they all knew. It was an old English carol, for the clock had struck the hour and it was Christmas morning. BOOK II GOLDEN YOUTH • •

CHAPTER I

RED SQUIRRELS

THE Adirondack lake lay placid under smiling skies, a few silver tipped clouds flicked by gay winds merely accentuating the perfection of the late August day. Beyond the deep green of the lake and the line of encircling hills curved mountains loomed, a soft Confederate gray against a vault of lapis lazuli. Almost to the edge of the woods the waves broke upon a narrow pebbly beach and an overturned canoe bespoke the presence of humankind, a presence resented by the pair of red squirrels scolding vehemently from a nearby tree-top.

Leaning against the trunk of a maple already touched by the flamboyant brush of the master painter, Autumn, was a girl, long and slim and lazy, while facing her a youth, square-chinned, blonde and wearing glasses, sat cross-legged upon a rug of soft gray moss.

The girl was tanned a creamy brown, warm color burned through the tan on each oval cheek and her eyes glowed, lustrous and dreamy, under straight finely drawn brows. Her simple linen frock was of that rare blue which painters love, a blue which time enriches and few modern artists attain, the tone usually achieved not by cunning man-made dyes, but rather by sun, wind and water. Possibly sophisticated city folk might have deemed it not picturesque but faded. Yet the girl or the gown or the resentful squirrels had inspired the youth to something almost like an impassioned monologue.

"Nine years since that first talk in the apple orchard, Sally. In your blue frock you look about nine months older. Yet in Italy I got a magazine with an illustrated poem by Sara Hull Dallam. and underneath Jim's scrawl: 'See how high she flies!' Oh Sally, Sally, you're a blue-stocking, even a literary critic—yet the same old dimple gives a fellow the same old thrill . . . And you know it . . . Two years ago you hadn't discovered what damage that dimple could do.''

"Hadn't I? Of course you must know, Mr. Worldly Wiseman! But it is funny, my playing critic."

She laughed, a pleasant throaty chuckle.

"When I was in New York last Spring I went to see a magazine editor who had bought some verses and a frightfully learned paper of mine on Modern Fiction. When I introduced myself he nearly had apoplexy! I suppose he was fifty, and he had formed a mental picture of Sara Hull Dallam. It seems I was tall, dark, wasted looking, my black hair streaked with gray, and possessed of a melancholy past . . . When he got his breath he had the impudence to fling Kipling at me, those lines about the good time coming, probably the millenium,

> "When the oldest colors have faded And the youngest critic has died . . ."

Don laughed until the maddened squirrels threw down bits of leaves and bark at him.

"Lucky they don't publish the photographs of all their contributors, Sally. That would be fatal. But I'm getting a few shocks myself just now. Jim's office in Washington looks as though he had been practising medicine at least ten years, and Marion's babies are old enough to bully their uncles. Also Geoffrey has been building a real railroad in the West, and you're earning money by stringing words together and signing your name. I feel like an office boy among a bunch of Wall Street nabobs."

"Sounds humble," said Sally, "yet you've hypnotized a leading firm of New York architects into taking you in, when their office is always full. And I heard last winter of a roomful of your drawings at the Architectural League, sent from Rome. So don't pose; just tell me everything!"

Nothing loath, Donald dilated upon what clever youngsters were in that distinguished office, how decent the head of the firm had been, and then began to talk of Italy, telling her of cathedrals and mellow palaces and slender towers pricked against that incredible sky. He spoke too of an old dealer in Rome with a shop full of marvelous tapestries and mantels and ancient carvings, oh, a wonder, that shop! And of how the owner so passionately loved his treasures that a good sale would put him in a vile humor for a week. That was the fascination of the old world; they cared for beauty and tradition, not merely for size, success, money. "Oh, Don, don't! I'm always hearing of America's

"Oh, Don, don't! I'm always hearing of America's crimes against art—of the tragedy of coming back from Paris, Italy, anywhere! But even Washington will count in a few years; it's simply a matter of our artists getting the best training abroad and doing their best work at home."

"It sounds easy," said Don, "and I'm no fan for expatriated Americans. I belong here, and here I'll stay. Of course I am planning to work wonders upon little old New York—if they'll just give me the change! I've got some wonderful Italian photographs to show you, and stacks of ideas, half seen designs . . ."

He sat looking at her thoughtfully, and Sally liked the outlines of his well-shaped blond head against the filmy blues and greens of water and hills. After a while he said in quite a different tone:

"Sally, I wonder if you know . . ."

"What, Don?"

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"How you've counted, since those summers we used to swim and sail together, what your letters have meant to me. They have all seemed to harp on one note, your trust in me. Ever since I was a boy I've thought that word 'trust' corking. Did you mean it, or was it accident?"

"I'm not sure I understand." Her color had deepened, but she met his eyes with the pleasant frankness of the child he had known so well. "Of course I've trusted you, felt that other men might do things cheap, mean, ugly, but not Don. Is that what you mean?"

"I've wondered sometimes whether you've been calculating your effects? In plain English, consciously keeping me straight—sort of hypnotic-uplift business."

Sally leaned her head back upon her arms, looking at

him with that straight gaze of hers, smiling a little, and he stared back, both faces intent, brilliantly youthful in the hard bright sunshine.

"As bad as that?" she asked.

He said irrelevantly: "I've felt somehow that you knew."

"What, Don?"

"Oh, the game, as most men play it,—the sort of women they meet, the silly ache to try things out, all sorts of things! Whether you've realized it, or not, you've stayed right by me, Sally, ever since those first letters, at college."

He hesitated an instant, but she said nothing and he went on:

"Once or twice I got on rotten ice, and then some phrase in your letter, some simple friendly word yanked me back to safety. It wasn't that you preached or posed or talked religion. You didn't. But you seemed to keep your hand in mine, just as you did when you were fourteen. I used to look at people, ask myself what Sally would think of them . . . it was uncanny, that sense of your nearness. It didn't make me into any 'plaster saint'—I suppose most men put up with things a nice woman would hate—coarse talk, a kind of cheap male cynicism. But—well, you've counted, Sallykins."

Her color deepened, for an instant there was a film over her eyes.

"Oh, I'm glad—and it wasn't altogether accidental."

She hesitated, turning things over in her mind, choosing her words:

"You see, Don, that first year when I came home from boarding school I was awfully ignorant, just a blind baby. Then I got to know people who were a little older. Other girls and men,—more sophisticated, more complex—some of them were splendid. But different . . ."

She paused; back in her mind was the memory of Geraldine, then she was sure that her story was not even for Don. She continued:

"It seemed to me that one sort of man is like all this around us,—water and air and earth. When you're with him you can take long breaths, feel happy andsafe! But there are so many others, men used to funny perfumes and painted cheeks and little plushy minds, and they spoil things, if you let them, the poems and books you love best, even outdoors, skylines."

Donald stared at this Sally whom he had seen riding an ancient hobby-horse in a garret. Where had she garnered her uncanny wisdom?

She answered his unspoken question with a nod:

"Oh, I know! You think nice girls can't know about horridness. Yet why shouldn't we?—When we read everything, once we're out of school, meet people —and we aren't dull! There was a man older than most of those we knew. Anne brought him to see me, and Mother met him too. He was well groomed, clever, rather handsome, and he had read everything, been everywhere; hearing him talk was like listening to Othello. Sometimes Mother was around when he came and sometimes she left me to entertain him. And I rather liked him at first, though he said queer things. For instance that 'good women were often charming but always absurd, that they fought nature, the forces of life.' He seemed to think men had more sense!

"Then he brought me Schopenhauer and Swinburne, and when Mother saw the books she smiled; I didn't know why till afterward. He talked a lot about the importance of young girls knowing the facts of life, and of course I agreed with him there, and so did Mother. But when he said 'Peter Ibbetson' and 'The Brushwood Boy' were 'nonsense,' that there 'weren't no such animals,' he made me angry. Especially when he added what I suppose may have been a very funny speech, but it wasn't clean. You see he'd been leading up to personalities and he tried to hold my hand. I let him, for a moment, and then I looked at it—said his hand was beautifully kept but that his mind made me remember how musk smelled!"

Donald laughed so suddenly and loudly that the squirrels were scandalized.

"What an outrageous speech, Sara! What did the poor devil say?"

"He was furious-went home promptly, and never

came back. And when Anne asked me what I thought of him I told her, and she said the Doctor hadn't liked him either, but that she'd thought it was because he was a prejudiced elderly parent?"

"And your mother, Sally. I don't see why she let the man come at all."

Sally's eyes grew reminiscent.

"I didn't either, so I asked her. And she knows us better than Dr. Dulaney does! She put down Jane Austin's 'Emma' and said, 'I've known you over twenty years, Sally. And I thought you could take care of yourself. If I had told you just how the man impressed me I knew you and Anne would think me a prejudiced old poke. So I let you smell the musk for yourselves'."

Don laid down on a pillow of pine needles and stared straight up at the sky. At last he turned back to Sally.

"I'm beginning to wonder whether it was Sally or her mother who's been making me watch my step!"

They looked soberly at each other;

"She always lets me have a free hand like that," Sally continued. "I have to find out people for myself, she won't decide things for me or size up new men. And she wants me to meet them, she has a theory that girls over-chaperoned either became confirmed old maids or marry unhappily because they never really know men at all."

"I suppose she's right there," said Don thoughtfully. Sally rose to her feet with one lithe movement.

"It's been splendid, Don, this talk. But now we must get back to the camp. It feels late and I'm frightfully hungry."

Don took the firm brown hand and said deliberately:

"Sally, over there I've been dreading the plunge— America, and practical life—but now, thank the Lord, I'm back! You're worth coming home to, even from Rome! And you seem to have the most remarkable mother on this planet!"

"I have," said Sally, with that proud little smile which the thought of Honor Dallam often evoked. She added in a different tone:

"The red squirrels aren't resigned to us yet-though

we've rehearsed the events of two years and almost talked the moon up."

They righted the canoe and paddled out into the middle of the lake where the water rippled and wavered like a huge sheet of wrinkled metal under a luminous sky. As they went the wind sighed in the trees along the shore and the paddles beat out a music all their own, a melody delicate as moonshine.

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MOONLIGHT

A^T the camp across the lake the babies were in bed upstairs, supper spread in the beamed living room with its huge fireplace in which a little fire blazed gaily, and Marion sat at her desk, writing.

At twenty-eight, and after five years of marriage Marion Graham, now Marion Ashe, the wife of Jerry Ashe—who had been a civil engineer until Marion finally persuaded him to study law—was as tall, as lean, as world-wise and managing as the girl Sally had first known more than nine years ago, the girl who had perpetually worked upon her friends and family, altering, remodeling, now and then making them entirely over, as people make over a badly upholstered couch or chair.

She herself was not beautiful, yet she had a long-limbed, finely chiseled delicacy of line, an ineffaceable look of race. Nobody tried to remodel Marion, save now and then when her mother urged that if she would just leave people alone she would be more completely loved. But Marion did not crave love, save from a very few: what she craved was power. And her father had been known to remark that only a dozen children could really occupy her energies, that he hoped for everybody's peace of mind there might be at least that number. But Jerry Ashe, devoted to his children, was yet modern, thrifty, loving his own comfort with no yearning to father a large family. There were two little Ashes now. a boy of four and a girl a year younger, and to Jerry his family seemed about complete. Marion herself was competent, busy, devoted to her home and her babies. and constantly talking about Jerry's work, his prospects, his future.

As Don and Sally appeared she remarked cheerfully: "You might have caught some fish for supper, Don,

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I suppose you and Sally have been reviewing your re lives! Well, I won't complain. After all I had here for that purpose!"

Illy went across the room, kissed Marion on her oval k, and remarked, as Don ran upstairs for a hasty b:

We've had our first orgy. And oh, Marion, I'm Italy gave Don what he went for and let him alone. night have come back with a Van Dyck beard and an it. He might be engaged to an Italian princess of a Marion Crawford novel. And he isn't changed tom!''

ley ate supper in the soft light of candles and of the ering fire, with all the windows open to the night, tiful, fragrant, alluring as any woman. Sally and talked a little, smiled at each other rather irrelely, and ate sugar-cured ham from Virginia, tables out of the camp garden and sizzling griddle s, brown and flaky and generously drenched in le syrup.

ven in an Adirondack camp Marion's genius for ing the domestic machine without a hitch gave one use of utter comfort and content.

id then Sally experienced the slight shock of disand dread which sometimes comes when life seems thest. Marion announced that more guests were to 'e in the morning, Jim—everybody always wanted -and a new friend of Marion's, a Southern girl n Sally had met in Washington the winter before. I Jerry may arrive any day, so we'll be six, besides hildren. And you'll both like Helena Hart. She's nguished and beautiful, older than I, but looks like butante, speaks French and Italian, and has been ywhere!''

Miss Hart?" asked Don. "She's not married?"

arion poured the after dinner coffee from a lovely silver coffee-pot which she had brought even to the s. Sally noticed that she flushed slightly as she rered Don's question.

Well, as a matter of fact she did marry, years ago, an impossible person—some money, but very little else, and much older than Helena. So she got a divorce—she had good cause—and as she was still very young and there were no children she took her own name again. Hardly any one knows that she's been married."

Neither Don nor Sally made any remark, and far down the glen came the clear call of a persistent lover: "Whip-poor-Will, Whip-poor-Will, Whip-poor-Will."

After supper Marion had her letters to finish, and Don and Sally wandered into the open, toward that clear anxious oft-repeated calling. The moon was high, the water sparkled, there was a soft dimness in the wood beyond them in the clearing, and on the lake a luminous radiance. They sat down on a log where they could see the sheen of the water and the dark curve of mountains against a pale sky.

"The Mediterranean is wonderful!" said Don dreamily, "and Chillon, Amalfi, ruins and cathedrals and Italian nights. Yet I've never seen anything finer than this Adirondack lake, with Sally and her blue frock in the foreground."

"I meant to change," said Sally in a surprised voice.

"But why? When you couldn't fit more perfectly into the frame than you do . . ."

They sat quite still, listening to the lap-lapping of the water, to the sighing of the wind in the trees, to that plaintive, persistent Whip-poor-Will-ing.

After a little Sally said:

"How unreal beauty like this seems, just a stage setting. I'm afraid to move . . . we might wake and find it a dream."

Don laid a hand on hers for an instant. "That funny little girl I remember wasn't 'afraid'—even of moonlight! Sally, do you remember your gruesome idea that when a dog bites you and later goes mad you go mad too? I was never sure that I convinced you how absurd you were!"

"You didn't!" she replied. "I thought you merely young and optimistic! A long time afterward Dr. Dulaney heard Anne and me talking about it, laughed at us. At first I was very angry. . It's a serious thing to shatter a child's faith, even in the dismalest ghost. But later I had a tremendous sense of relief. Sometimes when some ugly thing seems true, even now, I remember what the Doctor said to us at that time. 'There's a haunted wood of pet bogies, things people believe half their lives, only to discover that they have sweated and agonized over imaginary dangers.' He said another queer thing: 'The evils that destroy us are almost never the calamities we've feared.'"

"Well, I wouldn't call that a cheerful sentiment to impart to growing minds," said Don.

"Yet if it's true. Don?"

The young man looked at the girl sitting in the delicate glory of moonlight, and had a queer contraction of his heart. That Sally should ever suffer, be overtaken by tragedy . . . it seemed absurd, preposterous. Or that people, they themselves, should grow sad or ill or old, in a world of white moonlight! At that moment he was conscious of a deeper note in his feeling for her, something more poignant, more mature than the old, boyish affection. He noted the curve of her throat, the delicate chiseling of her eyelids. And then he told himself that she was very young . . . that he was still regarded as the "kid draftsman" in that huge prosperous office.

For a long time they watched the lake, listening absently to the whippoorwills, thinking their vague formless thoughts.

Don said at last:

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"You've met Marion's friend, Sally. What's she like?"

Sally was silent and he spoke again:

"You don't like her?"

"She's beautiful, so beautiful that I felt I ought to be crazy about her, yet somehow I wasn't. Jealousy, I guess. Or a silly narrowness, for I hate her concealing her marriage. It seems tricky, not fair to other people, men she meets, even other women. Do you know what I mean?"

"Yes, I suppose I do, though haven't even fools the right to some privacy, when they've messed up their lives? Yet there's a kind of reticence that amounts to deceit of course. Still . . ." Sally sighed. "Oh I know! Mother looks at me and says that 'intolerance is the ugly sister of sincerity." And the other day she hoped time would bring me tolerance without making me less frank. She seemed pessimistic about it!"

Don chuckled. "Just the same isn't it a dangerous virtue for the young? I've found it works for ourselves as well as for the other fellow. If we forgive people easily we get to forgiving ourselves without a struggle!—But who's been getting on your nerves now?"

Sally smiled and flushed.

"It isn't 'now'. Mother just heard the end of a small tragedy that happened when I was very young, before you knew me. Dr. Dulaney just gave me this on my birthday." She touched a little gold chatelaine watch that she wore. "And Mother wanted to know what happened to the only other watch I ever owned."

"Tell me the story," said Don.

"It was at the drab boarding house before I met Alfred. I must have been about eleven. A man boarded there for several months, better dressed, more prosperous than the other boarders, and his friends were men in Congress, even Senators. We saw him three times a day at meals and he was very polite to Mother and me. He wore expensive striped shirts and a brown suit with a black dot and he was big, well groomed, with plump hands and the back of his neck all fat and crinkled . . . you know!"

Donald's laughter was that of lean self-confident youth. "Poor old thing! Was that why you hated him?"

Sally wrinkled her straight brows.

"I don't know, but when he touched me I wanted to wriggle away. Once when he kissed me I went upstairs and scrubbed my cheek with sand soap. Mother found me crying. She said she knew just how it felt to be kissed because you were little and couldn't protect yourself. But when she asked me why I disliked him so I couldn't explain. Just the same *she* didn't like him either."

"Well, afterward I tried to be polite, and finally he

went away. But before that it was Christmas time, and on Christmas morning there was a package at my plate. I opened it and it was a lovely little gold watch!"

After all those intervening years Sally's voice had a note of rapture touched with regret.

"It was a dream of a watch, Don. And I was only eleven. It even had my initials monogrammed on the back, but when I opened the tiny envelope which came with it his card was inside. I came near crying, then and there, in the dining-room full of people. And Mother understood; she always does, you know. She was so polite, thanked him, regretted that I couldn't accept such a valuable present. But my initials were on the back, he insisted that he couldn't give it to anyone else! She saw that refusing it must seem rude, and so she let him pin it on my frock."

Sally paused, and, to Don, looked very like that intolerant little girl. She went on presently:

"He left Washington and I wore the watch, and then after a week or two it disappeared. I told Mother it was lost, but until this year she didn't know exactly how."

Her smile mocked her own perversity and yet had a tinge of wistfulness.

"It haunted me, Don, whether I wore it or left it in I loved the gift and detested the giver. One its case. day when I had worn it to school and the children had admired it and envied me I started home, my feeling about it more than ever mixed. I came to a great hole in the street where workmen were digging. Underneath were some wooden props and, below these, rock and a little stream trickling. There was nobody near for the moment, just a sign to warn people and a lantern swinging on a pole which they lighted at night, and I took off the watch and I remember I kissed the monogram! Then I dropped it very carefully into the hole, so that it fell on a soft spot where a workman might find it. I thought perhaps he might have a little daughter who would use it and love it, with no hateful associations. And I never told Mother about it until the other day, never had another watch till now."

Donald sat silent for a little, while the fragrant night seemed to close about them both.

"Funny things, antagonisms," he said. "And sometimes awfully unfair. I wonder what the man was really like—whether your instinct was true or whether it was just his plump hands and his ugly neck—accidents of physical make-up that nobody can help."

He added in a different tone:

"I wish this Helena woman weren't coming. The place is great, would be perfect with just us, old Jim, perhaps Anne. But of course Marion being Marion..."

He paused and they were both silent. It was an ancient grievance, the fact that Marion persisted in bringing her friends together whether they were congenial or antagonistic if she happened to want them at the moment.

"But after all, Sally, we won't have to play with her! I came here to see my family and my Sally Dallam, and nobody else."

As they strolled back to the camp, Sally took Donald's arm, and squeezed it between her firm slim hands.

"Don, having you back is the best thing that's happened in years. Letters are all very well, but . . ."

"But this is better," he murmured, and in the tranquil silence of the night they too were silent, watching the lake through the dark slender trunks, the purple of the girdling mountains, the sheen of white moonlight on the barely moving water.

"You used to, sometimes, when your hair and skirts were bobbed, Sally. Do you mind? Now?"

She tilted her firm chin and kissed him swiftly upon his cheek, a kiss as firm and light as her touch, yet not quite what he had meant. She said with a long-drawn breath:

"Don, it's all wonderful!"

"What, Sally ?"

"White moonlight, people, the ones who understand and care and count! Sometimes life is like a splendid frieze, knights and ladies and wind-blown garments and horses rearing! And, oh, just being alive . . ." Don caught her mood of sheer blind happiness, soared with her for an instant, then touched earth hardily, saying, in the voice that could be whimsical, half ironic: "Are you twenty-one or thirteen, Sally Dallam?"

Sally had a swift vision of a little girl staring at Death, a grim revulsion which made this glamor of moonlit lake seem a mirage . . . Her mood of unreasoning joy was shut off as by a black curtain, but she did not speak, and Don guided her homeward through the black shadow of the pines.

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THE BEAUTIFUL LADY

THEY arrived the next day, Jim, lean and tall, more like his mother than ever and curiously unlike Donald, save for the way their faces both suggested the Senator in a certain firmness of mouth and jaw. The brothers shook hands as casually as though they had not been separated for over two years, but Sally noticed the way they watched each other, the old half-shy look of interest, a sort of veiled dog-like devotion in both the brown eyes and the gray. There was not four years between them, but the young physician's experience as a student at Johns Hopkins and as a hospital interne, had matured him with the rapidity which responsibility alone achieves. Sally thought that he looked six or seven years the elder, a vigorous, lightly built, interesting looking man.

Yet Donald in his early twenties had a brilliancy of coloring, a breadth of shoulders and depth of chest possessed by neither Jim nor Marion. This look of health and his blond hair perhaps increased his effect of youth. And as Marion said: "Don looks more like Sally's brother than ours, Jimsy." Actually in coloring, bearing and physique Don and Sally were alike, the sort of likeness which sometimes breeds interest as surely as opposites attract.

The girl who arrived with Jim was a contrast to the whole group in being rather a small person. And she was really beautiful, with that beauty which nobody challenges or denies. Her clothes, simple, exquisite, expensive, completed the effect. Don was conscious of surprise, he felt dazzled as he had been when he first stood by the sea-wall at Amalfi, and gazed at the Italian sky, the line of mountains, the deep blue of the water. For this girl, unlike Sally, did not fit into the frame of the Adirondack wood, about her there was something alien. Looking at her one thought of storied vistas, pergolas, of a background not obviously artificial but everywhere chastened and mellowed by man's art. Her hair, a lovely warm red-gold in color, was dressed high, simply, yet with something inevitable in its ordered effective-Under rather arched black brows her eves ness gleamed a curious tawny hue, not brown or hazel, but full of warm golden lights. And her profile was so delicately perfect that it might have been copied from an old coin, a shade too Greek, perhaps, with the nose and forehead making an unbroken line. Her lips were red and curved, lips that suggested youth, vigorous life, passion, yet when her face was in repose an observant cynic might have pointed out that the lips were rather thin, curving downward, and that her brilliant and large eyes were set a little too close together. But no unprejudiced and normal man could quickly be conscious of any flaw in a jewel so perfect. Even Sally found herself looking at this astonishing person much as she would have looked at a painter's masterpiece. You might distrust her perfection, wish to dislike her, but you couldn't help watching her.

The next evening brought Jerry Ashe, laconic, ugly and able, walking through the wood with his long swinging stride, his hat in his hand and a knapsack strapped across his shoulders. He had missed the boat and decided to tramp the ten miles through the woods. Marion, usually so calm and self-contained, was suddenly younger, gayer, happier. Her husband's unexpected arrival had taken her by surprise, and the surprise was pleasant. For already Marion saw the others dividing into pairs, and despite babies and housekeeping, had wondered whether to-morrow she was not going to be lonesome, unless Jerry came. She had no intention that her family should see into her busy, always maneuvering mind, but she had asked Helena to the camp for a definite purpose. Jim, her favorite brother, needed a sufficiently dowered wife, and Marion considered that Helena Hart might make a satisfactory sister-in-law. There were times when she worried about Jim. He was prone to sudden sympathies and enthusiasms. Women

who were delicate or lonely or in some way unfortunate appealed to him, and he never seemed to appreciate the paramount importance of the things Marion valued most, distinction, social prestige, the possession of enough wealth to smooth life's path...

Strangely Marion cared enough for Sally to enable her to ignore that young person's obvious poverty. If she and Don wanted to marry some day Marion might quite approve. After all Sally belonged to them all, she had the beauty of health, and youth, was well born and rather clever despite that simplicity, that touch of unworldliness which sometimes irritated Marion. Although of course there was the chance that Sally and Don might know each other too well.

The first day they all idled about the camp and played with the babies, Jim and Prim, as they were called. Small Jim was dark and slim like his elder uncle and his mother, and Prim was a flower-faced, fair-haired, button-mouthed little person in pink rompers and a delicious pink sunbonnet. Both were friendly, talkative, with alluring baby voices and sudden bubbles of mirth. Prim rode on Uncle Don's shoulder and pulled down Sally's heavy coil of hair, and looked at the new strange lady with eyes like wide open bluebells.

Helena held out her beautiful hands and Jim went to her at once, sat on her lap, touched the wonder of her embroidered blouse, a symphony of delicate color, her loose string of coral beads, and then demanded to see the inside of her watch, an exquisite atom, even tinier than Aunt Sally's watch; little Jim was sure it was only a locket. But no, it was a real watch, with hands that moved, and Prim must see them. But Prim wouldn't leave Sally for the lovely lady with hair like warm sunlight, and Helena offered a bribe.

There was chocolate upstairs for Jim and Prim; Mother had said they might have some. And they should . . . if Prim would just come to Aunt Helena.

But Prim was reluctant, she clung to Sally, who, a little embarrassed, tried to persuade her that this was a lovely new aunt with a wonderful watch, oh, much finer than Sally's watch! And then with the others looking on, smiling at the picture they made in the sunlight against the pines, gray-eyed Sally in her blue gown with the pink tiny girl, and five feet away Helena in a hammock, radiant as Aurora and much more elegant and modern, suddenly there was a shocking and astounding uproar.

Prim flung herself upon Sally's breast and shrieked to high Heaven. She wanted the chocolate, yearned for it, yelled for it, but she wouldn't pay the price, accept the embraces of this pushing new Aunt! She wanted Aunt Sally and nobody else, wailing madly, passionately, as though she alone had discovered the art of weeping and Heaven itself must hear and intervene. It was a dreadful moment, and Marion, shocked, came out of the house and bore away her tactless offspring.

Sally, looking and feeling very uncomfortable, apologized for her small friend, but Don said coolly:

"She's a little savage, Miss Hart, a jealous girl baby, determined to keep in the spotlight. Her tantrum is really the highest compliment she could pay you."

Helena's lips curled up at the corners, Jim and Sally laughed, and the awkward little drama was swept into the discard. It was time for a swim, and the girls went off to get into their bathing suits. Jim and Donald stood for an instant looking after them.

"Some young goddess, Marion's Helena!" said Donald.

"Don't you wonder what she's really like?" said Jim dispassionately. "Girls' bodies and their minds are strange running mates, now and then."

Don put his hand on Jim's shoulder. "How goes it, old man?"

And Jim, walking beside him, keeping step as they had done for so many years, said soberly:

"By heck, Don, having you home feels like dropping a load off one's back, getting to be a boy again!"

All that day and the next day Sally was outwardly her usual self, but secretly longing to linger with the babies rather than wander into the forest with the others. Somehow the charmed intimacy of the little group seemed to have vanished with Helena's coming. Yet the daily swim in the cold water under the luminous early Autumn sky still meant sheer delight. The brothers went in with Sally, but after the first few days Marion and Helena declared that the water was impossible. Marion swam well but hated the first plunge, and Helena looked like a water nymph in her green silk bathing suit, but her appearance was her sole asset in the water. She could swim a little but tired easily and was plainly disconcerted by the contrast which her performance offered to the ease and grace of the others. Actually this friend of Marion's could never bear to be put at a disadvantage, even in the most unimportant particular. Obviously she was used to dominating any group she might honor by her presence, and when the conversation turned upon subjects with which she was unfamiliar it was curious how speedily the topic was allowed to drop, apparently by common consent.

Yet Sally chid herself for certain ungracious meditations.

"I'm jealous," the girl told herself angrily. "The men watch her as if they were hypnotized—and she is the loveliest thing I've ever seen! Why do I let her freeze and alter me, so that I'm not myself with any one but Jim and Prim?"

Poor Sally had never in her life been accused of the cheap and dreadful taint of envy, she had never even accused herself of such a thing. This horrid suspicion that she disliked Helena because of her very loveliness gave her a sick distaste of herself.

And then quite suddenly she began to notice the fact that when the six paired off her own companion was oftener Jim than Don. How this happened she did not know, and perhaps neither Jim nor Donald could have explained it. But one afternoon they climbed to the top of Graybeard Mountain, four of the party, for Jerry and Marion stayed at the camp, the children's nurse being ill. And high on the ridge Jim and Sally waited for the others, and waited more than an hour.

The view was magnificent and Sally sat on a gray

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rock wrapped in a loose blue cloak, with Jim lean, dark and lazy, smoking his pipe, and pointing out the various peaks. Being with Jim was always pleasant, for Sally had long felt him to be the most brotherly of all her friends. She made him tell her about Anne, whom he had seen last, and talk about his work, the cases which interested him, and Jim talked well. He had for his profession a veritable passion. A realization of suffering in either animals or men, the result of a sensitive imaginative mind, had made the boy Jim almost morbidly sympathetic. Now his power to cure, or at least relieve the physical ills of man and beast, served as an outlet to that old passion of pity, and though already overworked and underpaid he was exquisitely content in the practice of his profession.

He told Sally something of a new patient, a young married woman who had been through a severe nervous shock and breakdown. She had recently come to Washington with her husband, a patent lawyer of notable ability now employed by the Government. They were an interesting couple with every right to complete prosperity and happiness, but the wife's experience—she had been in a horrible railroad accident, seen her young brother killed, and barely escaped being burned in the wreckage—had resulted in months of insomnia and acute depression. Her condition was proving a difficult problem both for her husband and her physician, and Jim ended his story with an appeal.

"When you get back I want you to meet her, Sally. She knows very few people, and if she's too much alone I'm afraid for her. There's a possibility of acute melancholia, if she's allowed to dwell on the past. What she needs is some understanding woman friend in Washington, some generous normal girl, like yourself, able to give her sympathy, a fresh outlook."

Sally, looking down the trail they had followed to the mountain top, felt the blood burn in her cheeks. Her voice had a poignant note which caught Jim's sensitive ear.

"I'm not generous, Jim, not normal...I'm a horrid puny shrimp!"

Jim laid his pipe on a convenient ledge in the rock they were sitting on and turned to this crimson-cheeked young person whose gray eyes were blurred.

"Why Sally! What on earth . . ."

She met the questioning look in the dark eyes, made a gesture with both hands, tossing discretion and reserve into the gulf between them.

"Oh, Jim, Jim, I'm a little green-eyed cat! And I've never been like this since I was twelve years old. It's horrible!"

Jim looked down the trail too, and he did not smile. That something in him which always ached to punish cruelty and relieve pain came to Sally's rescue. He laid his hand over hers, protectingly, said things he had fully meant to leave unsaid.

"Why, you young idiot, you might as well be jealous of some smooth swift thing in the woods, flecked with gorgeous colors, beautiful... but deadly! Marion wrote and asked me to go to see Helena Hart last winter, and I went. But before I'd been with her an hour I was on guard. And since then I have caught her in a tissue of little needless lies: her very look and manner and way of living are lies. I felt like taking my hat off to Prim the other day, jealous kitten! For Marion's friend is a woman of experience playing the ingenuous girl; she has the sort of vanity acutely dangerous because she'll do anything to feed it."

He smoked a moment, then continued: "I suppose she has had a bad time; a decent man can't make war on women. So I've kept my mouth shut; luckily she knows enough to avoid me. But if I thought Don involved really interested—I wouldn't keep quiet on any grounds of chivalry! One strand of his yellow mane is worth Helena's whole body and what she'd call her soul into the bargain!"

"Why, Jim!" Sally gazed at him with astonished eyes, then she put out her hand and gripped him tightly.

"'You mustn't talk about her to Don," she commanded, "truly, Jim."

"I won't, unless it's necessary."

"You mustn't, anyhow," cried Sally, "oh, Jim, promise!"

"But why, child?"

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Sally dropped his hand, fiercely gripped her own knees.

"Because you've nothing against her, nothing really definite, plenty of people lie, it's the thing to do, when you're grown up. Lying's useful! But I—Jim, if they can't feel what we feel about her, Marion and Jerry and Don, we mustn't prejudice them. After all she has beauty, magnetism; as you say, she's probably had a bad time. If anything hurts her through my silly jealous distrust it will be hideous, as though I'd been underhanded talking this way to you. Don't you see?"

Jim whistled softly. "Yet they say women have no sense of justice or honor! All right, Sally. I'll keep my mouth shut—for the present anyhow—though I'm not sure I ought to. Will that do?"

Sally gave a sigh of relief.

"It's not 'justice' or 'honor', Jim. Nothing so high sounding. It's sheer funk, the fear of having to loathe myself, for I've wanted to make Don see her just as we do! Perhaps I can't help my feeling about people, but at least I needn't hurt them just because I happen to detest them."

They sat silent for a long time, Jim again smoking his neglected pipe and Sally touching a little clump of delicate ferns with the tips of her fingers, not breaking one delicate frond. After a while he said slowly:

"Yet in a way you're wrong, quite wrong. Grown people generally can't afford to be as primitive as children—I grant that. But for us to repress all our instincts and aversions and secret convictions is dangerous; it is, Sally. I see that constantly in my profession. Our notion of honor is high sounding, 'noble' if you like, but damned hard on the race."

Sally watched a brown butterfly, its wings stippled delicately with gold dust and tiny blurs of blue, and that wide sweep of azure abyss just beyond the butterfly and his treasure trove of pink clovers. The quiet

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beauty soothed her like a kind hand. She said thoughtfully:

"I may seem silly, Jim. But we have to be guided by our own queer angel, or devil. If we aren't we're false to the only truth we know."

"Yet if it isn't truth," Jim parried.

Sally gave a little shrug, a sigh. "Isn't it all relative, truth? Is anything uncomplicated, final?" Then she stiffened unconsciously, her face burned.

"Here they are!"

Donald and Helena came over the ridge, Don carrying both their hats, the late sunlight idealizing the man's blond vigor and youth, the girl's loosened hair, which gleamed like burnished metal. Even Don's summer flannels and blue tie seemed part of the picture, and Helena in her white with touches of green—the coral line at her throat, the warm tints of her skin, not cream or ivory or pale rose, but a subtle blend of all three—might have posed for Psyche in the guise of a twentieth century mortal, for some spirit of timeless beauty sprung from man's desire and dream.

For an instant they stood together, facing Sally and Jim. Helena said lightly:

"What's the matter with you two? You're as solemn as though you had seen a ghost!"

Sally was thinking how wonderful they looked together. At that moment there was no hint of jealousy in her admiration, and she answered gaily:

"We have, a horrid ghost; but we've laid it, thank Heaven! Haven't we, Jim?"

It seemed to Jim that Donald looked unusually alert, gloriously alive. Even the un-heroic eye-glasses could not diminish that radiance, and Jim was conscious of something like dread. Suppose old Don was capable of being swept off his feet by this incredibly lovely liar?

Then he caught Sally's eye, saw that her lips were curving happily. What a thing of moods she was. He answered her words and the meaning deeper than words:

"What Sally says goes! Though my own job is

grappling with germs rather than laying ghosts, and on the whole I prefer 'bugs' to 'ha'nts.''

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"You're a shirk," scoffed Sally with a tilt of her head, and Don broke in with:

"What are you two burbling about? You sound about as sane as the jabberwock!"

"Nothing of the slightest importance," said Sally. "But you had better get your breath and admire the view so we can start home. If we don't get down the mountain in a quarter of the time we took to climb it we'll miss our supper. And I happen to know that Marion was planning to have fresh fish and corn pone, topped off with waffles and maple sirup."

Whereupon the gathering glory of sunset lost its charm. Even Helena, in modish shoes with heels never meant for mountain paths, showed signs of hunger and haste.

During that next week the golden weather held, there was a smell of forest fires which the men talked of helping to fight, but the luxury of idleness held them all and beyond swimming and canoeing and much conversation nobody showed the slightest initiative.

More than once during those lazy days and moonlit nights Donald found himself tête-à-tête with Helena Hart, and her interest in his years in Italy, her air of dependence and that curiously personal manner of hers helped to compensate for what he was missing, the uninterrupted, unshared society of Sally Dallam. He told himself that the situation was inevitable, and that Helena was one of those feminine riddles a man should meet at least once in a lifetime, if his education is to be complete. What sort of woman she might be under that incomparable surface Donald neither knew nor greatly desired to know. But her beauty had its inevitable appeal; at times there was something almost wistful in her manner, something that suggested shadowy sorrows and regrets which she touched upon vaguely, preferably in the canoe, under the hypnotic glamor of moonlight.

One night she asked him to call her by her name:

"Being with a family again is so restful, Mr. Graham. But when Marion's brothers call me 'Miss Hart' I feel lonely, held at a distance. You see what I mean!"

Don professed to "see," called her "Helena" and paddled rapidly down the lake conscious of the witchery of the night and wishing that the girl leaning against the pile of silk cushions were Sally . . . Yet his oars dipped into liquid silver, deep in him Helena's beauty registered suddenly with a sort of click, like a camera when the picture is taken. God, but she was amazing!

And her silence at the moment was as perfect as her bright head outlined against the midnight blue of water and hills, with the moon turning the lake to a shining plane of precious metal. Then she was saying:

"I want you to understand, only true friends can, of course . . . So I married him at last. And then it began so soon, the misery that haunted me. He was insanely jealous of any man who even looked at meand he *drank*. I won't go into the horror of those years, how I remembered and longed for that other whom I had lost, how I came to crave even solitude, with freedom. Finally a friend of mine, a woman, insisted that it would be suicidal for me to go on living with him. So at last I got my divorce in the West, began life over."

Donald said something kind and sympathetic, and there was another long silence, broken only by the splash of the paddles, the sound of sleepy birds in a little cove they passed, then by the mournful hooting of an owl. Don decided that continuous silence was safer than speech, though certainly in a canoe, under the sheen of moonlight, silence may seem the most exquisite form of intimacy.

As they slid alongside the tiny wharf Don jumped out, secured the canoe, then held out his hand. Helena moved forward lightly but as she stepped over the edge of the boat she stumbled and he caught her; for an instant he was conscious of all her warm fragrance.

Her voice sounded through the stillness:

"Oh, thank you—Don! I was dreadfully clumsy." They walked up to the camp through the pines. Don

guiding her through the alternate shadow and moon-

e. Sally at her window saw the landing, heard clear voices. On the porch there came a laugh 1 Jerry, something inaudible, then in Don's deep s:

How do you expect a man to keep track of the time night like this, Jerry Ashe!"

her little room Sally finished braiding her hair, into bed, laid her face deep in the pillow as she had as a child. She had no coherent thoughts, none te relief of anger, no real surprise. She simply knew

life was a dreary business and wanted to go intly to sleep. . . . It seemed to her that whether ot she ever waked again was a matter of supreme fference.

CHAPTER IV

SALLY MAKES A DISCOVERY

BEING entirely healthy and young she went to sleep, if not instantly yet with no long delay, but early the next morning she lay watching the delicate fusion of sky and water and curving mountains in a dawn as lustrous as an opal. And there was still that soft lullaby to which she had fallen asleep, the crooning of the lake to the mellow accompaniment of the wind in the trees, now and then as sharp and poignant as the notes of a harp.

At first Sally felt the old fervor, beauty appealing to eye and ear, the caress of the light air blowing through the many casement windows of her little room. And then came that new feeling of dread, of distaste, that longing to escape, as she had wanted long ago to escape from the alien presence of the prosperous person who had given her the adored and detested watch ... why? That was the question she asked herself. Was it simple unalloyed jealousy? Yet when she had heard of Don's interest in a charming Boston girl whom he had met in Italy she had had a keen curiosity about the young woman, but none of this bewildering surge of disgust, anger, pain, and worse than all, this sense of sharp disappointment, a disappointment in Don for lacking discernment, intuition, whatever it was that made both Sally and Jim so sure of something under Helena's lovely surface at once false and dangerous.

Yet if Marion and Jerry liked and respected Helena Hart, why on earth should not Don be allowed the same privilege?

Suddenly her whole train of thought seemed horrible, repellant, and she sprang out of bed and after dressing swiftly went quietly from the still dim house into the luminous morning. According to the Doctor's gift it was not yet six, and Marion rarely breakfasted before nine, so she turned to the trail that led to the top of Graybeard and before long the steady climb, the sharp tonic of the air, the consciousness of freedom and communion with the wild heart of these hills she loved, steadied her, brought her back to normal.

She walked nearly five miles at top speed, up hill and down, until the blood was racing through her veins and she glowed with the ecstasy of health, youth and the vivid consciousness of beauty which seems to belong to the sound body as well as to the seeing spirit. High on the mountain top she found herself chanting that paean of Kipling's dedication to his dead friend:

"Beyond the path of the outmost sun, through utter darkness hurled

Further than ever comet flared or vagrant star dust swirled

Sit such as fought and sailed and ruled and loved and made our world.

. . . They are purged of pride because they died; they know the worth of their bays-

They sit at wine with the Maidens Nine and the Gods of the Elder Days-

It is their will to serve or be still as fitteth our Father's praise." . . .

Running down the trail toward the camp she knew again that impersonal happiness which Nature bestows upon her faithful lovers. On the mountain top her own tiny life seemed as irrelevant and unimportant as the tinkling of a piano would have sounded in the forest, where wind and wave were forever playing their unforgettable music compared to which man's small instruments seem as puny as himself. As she ran, her mind was again clear, her mood joyous, her step springy.

At the camp the first person she saw was Ĥelena, an enchanting vision in crisp ruffles and with two heavy braids of shining hair making a frame for her oval face. She was lying in the hammock, with a magazine in her hand. But Sally was washed clean of envy, of dread. She stood talking for a moment, then passed on into the house to find that the brothers had gone fishing and Marion and the babies to the summerhouse on the hill. Only Jerry was left, writing some business letters at his desk.

He looked up absently from his work. "Where's everybody ?"

Sally told him, adding: "And Helena is in the hammock, looking like a glorified Elaine, after the coming of Launcelot."

"Isn't Guenevere more her style?" said Marion's husband drily. "She's the sort of woman who sooner or later puts her mark on most of the men she meets."

Sally smiled. "Well, being married lets you out, Jerry."

"No reason for her monopolizing Don," grunted Jerry. "However, it's up to Marion. Because I'm docile she always thinks she can manipulate people's affairs like a skein of wool. But sometimes wool snarls!"

"Why Jerry!" This moody person, obviously rubbed the wrong way by the guest she had supposed he liked, was a new and baffling Jerry.

He seemed to realize her surprise and the truth came out with a rush, in the longest speech Sally had ever heard from him.

"Oh, I'm just *jealous*, like a fool woman! Marion seems to consider this girl she knows nothing about as important as her own family. I've been fed up on Helena and her very beauty's cloying. I'll wager Jim feels the same way, for he avoids her whenever possible. Of course she's had rotten luck—but she isn't safe—I find myself waiting for an explosion! She ought to be married again, to some stone age man who'd never let go. Some good looking, successful money-getter, so other women may envy her luck."

"Jerry Ashe!" Sally's tone was properly reproving, but it was enormously comforting to find Jerry suffering from her own recent complaint. Also the discovery of a common dislike lends luster to any friendship.

Jerry continued: "I knew the type more or less, before I married. And of course there's a hectic—and blameless—past, according to my wife. In spite of her complexion she's older than Marion, nearly as old as I. She was engaged to a young penniless inventor

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who finally struck a trail that meant a small fortune, and they were to be married. But he had some heart affection—died suddenly—leaving her all he had. Later an older man persuaded her to marry him. Of course he turned out no good—nothing's ever her fault!—and she divorced him. Since then she's lived on excitement—telegrams and special delivery letters different men each time she visits us. And now she's getting in her fancy work on Don."

Sally had been conscious of dizziness, then the haze cleared from her brain and she seemed to be again a little girl, looking at a still figure, and at an unopened letter. Helena, Helen, a girl from the South—Sally and her mother had heard that Alfred's invention had been successful—that the girl who had jilted him had inherited his little fortune. Yet the names and circumstances must be merely coincidence. She said quietly:

"Jerry, do you remember the name of the man—the inventor?"

"Buckingham, no, Buchanan. Arthur or Alfred Buchanan. He died about ten years ago, in Washington."

How she got to her own room Sally hardly knew. Once there, by the open window, the breeze blowing her filmy muslin curtains, and the voice of Helena in her ears, singing "Ole Black Joe" in a thin high soprano, she knelt with clenched hands. She was remembering Alfred, all his young charm, his kindness to a child, hating "this lovely liar" as she had never dreamed it was in her to hate. Yet according to that code which her first friend and her mother had considered the only possible code for a person of honor, her lips were sealed.

CHAPTER V

UNDER THE BIRCHES

YING in the sun a week later on a tiny sandy beach whither she and Don had paddled after their swim, Sally was conscious of being glad that she looked rather well, even in a damp bathing suit. Don was building a castle of sand in his best professional manner, quite an architectural feat, that castle. He had been describing a country house he was designing, and his eloquence brought from Sally a confession of her secret preoccupying thought, had Don understood.

"'It sounds simple enough for me and splendid enough for Helena, Don. Incidentally she seems to grow more beautiful every day."

Donald painstakingly added a moat and a drawbridge to his castle.

"Really, Sally, it's not quite respectable for a girl to look as she does in a canoe. Neither Jim nor I seem to have lost our heads yet—but I suppose it's a mere matter of time. But I do hate seeing less of you, Sallykins."

The other night Sally had been a little afraid that he might say-well, what she had felt it was still too soon To-day, in the hot sunshine, in her blue and to say. white bathing suit, with her uncovered sunburned hair, she wished that the danger would recur. And there came the sharp temptation casually to let fall the bald fact that Helena Hart was the Helen of Alfred Buchanan's young romance. That lie about being engaged to Alfred when he died-devotedly in love with him and marrying the other man long afterward because Alfred was dead and Helena alone in a tragic worldhow Donald would scorn such perversion of truth, worse even than the original betrayal. After all why shouldn't he know? And then she remembered the little girl she had been, whom Honor Dallam and Alfred had loved and respected.

She laughed softly to herself, really amused at the way one's principles interfere with one's comfort, in this perplexing world. Donald inquired:

"Just what's so funny, Sally ?"

"I was thinking of something that happened when I was a child, before I knew you, of the way one never quite grows up, in spite of all one's bluff! In some things I'm no older than Prim to-day; I wish I were half as nice!"

"Prim is—Prim!" said Donald, "the only niece I possess. But you shan't slander yourself, Sally. You're rather satisfactory—as you are!"

Abandoning his fort he possessed himself of Sally's hand. On the little beach they seemed as solitary as they would have been in the Garden of Eden before the introduction of the Serpent, although somewhere toward the south a white sail dotted the surface of the lake, to-day an intense blue.

Donald looked at the firm hand which he held, sunburned and strong, not particularly small. Yet it was shapely and smooth. He lifted it to his lips, then laid it against his cheek.

"Sally, you're a lovely thing! It's great to see you again—to know that with all the changes that had to come you're the same Sally, my Sally."

She rose suddenly; they stood facing each other. Words trembled on Don's lips, and Sally felt a strange sensation, a vague longing to escape, mingled with a tremulous indescribable delight. They had both forgotten Helena, forgotten every one. They saw, felt, desired nothing but this luminous, thrilling nearness to each other.

Together, arm in arm, they walked along the little beach, tacitly agreeing to prolong the moment of anticipation. For almost the first time in her life Sally was intensely conscious not alone of her eager spirit, her capacity to give and take of love, understanding, a glorious faith, but also of exquisite joy in her own untried youth, in the strength and beauty of her body. And to her Donald stood for vigor, grace, the sharp stimulus of contrast. She gave a long sigh.

"Dear, what is it?"

His arm went around her; the lake, its green reflection of forests close to the shore, the sky, the blue-gray hills, all these made an inimitable setting for the jewel of their young passion.

"Why do you sigh, my darling?"

"Because the world is so beautiful, Donald !"

"The world, Sally? ... Or this?"

"Ah, this . . . they match!"

But then he made speech impossible; those firm boyish lips held hers, her heart beat against his. She saw things through a mist, irridescent, glorious. They went in from the little beach to the shade of slim silver birches, and Sally was trembling, Donald pale. They sat very still under the trees, watching the blue water, not daring to look at each other. And at last Don said quietly, with that old effort to analyze, to understand, usually characteristic of the scientist rather than of the artist:

"Sally, if we didn't feel this way, both of us, I shouldn't dare ask you to marry me, in spite of our years of friendship. For it had to be everything, conviction of the mind, too. At first I wasn't sure, but now I know, we both know! I am yours for all my life. In a way I've always been yours. It's never before meant giving and asking everything. You know..."

"Yes, Don."

Both had the intense solemnity of youth in its high moments. He took away his arm and for an instant they stared at each other, without touching even the tips of their fingers. Sally had a feeling that no time to come would be more final than this hour under the birches.

She said at last: "It's so strange—and yet so right —that it should really be you all the time."

He made no answer save by a gesture, a movement; then his head was pressed down upon her knees and Sally's hands touched that thick bright hair she had always wanted to ruffle. He turned his face upward at

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last, smiling into her grave eyes:

"Sally, I thought they exaggerated—the poets—the novelists and actors . . . but they didn't tell half!"

Her face was burning, she covered it with cold fingers. Donald took them away.

"You never belonged, this way, before?"

"No, Don. There was a man once who said that I didn't 'understand.' I didn't know what he meant." "And you know now?"

"Yes."

He stood up abruptly, swung her to her feet.

"Come on, Sally. I've got to take you back. And I don't want to—I want to keep you here in the wilderness —away from everybody, just mine! And I can't!"

They launched the canoe, looked back at the strip of shining sand and the group of white birches, then at each other. Life might bring them wonderful gifts, but never again this hour. Without a spoken word the thought came to each, and with it a constriction of the throat, an absurd sense of loss.

Then Donald dipped his paddles into the clear water. "Never mind, Sally. We can't take the birches with us, but we've got all the to-morrows—together!"

The color in her cheeks deepened. "You go too fast, all in one morning!"

"Do I, Sally-faster than you-like?"

"No-o, please go on paddling, please!"

"Then don't sigh again, don't make me hate waiting so . . . What I want is to marry you now-to-day!"

She said in a dreamy voice he could barely hear: "It would be . . . wonderful—but too easy. We'll have to earn happiness."

"Yes," he said soberly.

They came nearer and nearer to their own landing. "There's Helena," said Sally. Don's voice rasped suddenly: "I'd like to send her

Don's voice rasped suddenly: "I'd like to send her packing, bag and baggage. She doesn't belong in the picture, our picture!"

But Sally laughed, fearless now of all the Helenas in the world. In the moment before bringing the cance into place along the edge of the tiny wharf, their eyes

met again in a long grave look which seemed to t them closer than any caress. Then the canoe ran against the dock; they could the children's laughter among the pines.

CHAPTER VI

SALLY GOES HOME

THAT evening after supper Jim brought the mail from the tiny village a mile down the lake. There were letters for everybody, a handful for the Doctor and for Helena, several for Marion, one for Donald and one for Sally.

Donald's was from Geoffrey Kent, whom he had not seen in over two years. Geoffrey had taken his degree at "Tech." and since then had been building roads for the Government in the West, and obviously enjoying much of his experience. Yet his letters always suggested to Donald the young man's yearning rather for artistic than technical achievement. Presently Don looked up, wanting to share an especially interesting page with Sally. He dropped the letter, went swiftly to her.

Apart from the others, with Prim lying on her arm gurgling sleepily, Sally sat in the hammock, usually occupied by Helena, a sheet of note paper dropped upon the turf, her face drawn and white. Donald saw that the others on porch and lawn were engrossed in their own mail, and asked in a low voice:

"What is it. dear?"

She recovered her letter, handed it to him, and sat looking over the lake, her hand on the sleepy baby's hair, while Donald read the page she had given him. It was from Dr. Dulaney, telling Sally very cheerfully and carefully that her mother was not well, and that she had better come home as soon as possible. He added that she had had an attack of malaria which had left her weak and nervous, but that he believed her month of holiday in the mountains which she had planned to take in September would set her on her feet again. Yet there were symptoms which worried him: they might yield to treatment, but in any case he felt that Sally would rather know the truth than be left in ignorance. And the sooner she could return the better.

"Of course I shall leave on the morning boat," the girl said very quietly.

"And I with you," said Don. But Sally shook her head with decision.

"No, Donald. That will let the cat out of the bagand Mother must know first. Then Jim's going on that tramping trip in the Berkshires to-morrow. So for the success of Marion's house-party it will be best for me to go alone."

To Donald this woman with set lips and not a vestige of color was tragically unlike the girl of that same morning, Sally of the shining eyes and curved lips, with that look of deepening adventurous delight.

He said sharply, yet so low that no one but small Prim could have heard, and she was fast asleep:

"Sally, there's nothing to be frightened about! Don't look like that—my darling."

Her color came back and just then Prim's nurse appeared. The child gave only a small sleepy sigh as her yellow head was transferred from Sally's breast to the shoulder of the young Swede.

"Stay a moment and let us talk things over," said Donald, and Sally obeyed. She said slowly:

"If it were any one but Mother, or rather if Mother were different, the complaining kind, I wouldn't feel so. But she's always been so well, so uncannily independent of doctors. And Dr. Dulaney is really worried."

Marion was calling them, and Don took Sally's arm and walked her along in the shadow of the pines.

"Of course you must go. And I'll stay, since that's what you want. Jim's friends expect him and he's planned it all. But I'll try to steal a week in Washington before going back to New York and the office. And then I mean to win over your Mother, and we'll announce it."

The red had come back to Sally's lips and her eyes

looked more normal. She pressed his arm, saying softly:

"You will . . . And Don, having you helps—oh, I can't tell you how it helps! Only you know what Mother is to me, what she's always been—just everything."

"Everything !----my Sally !"

To which she replied with queer irrelevance:

"Don, I knew this morning was too perfect to be safe."

They went in to tell Marion of Sally's letter, and her need to leave them, and then Sally disappeared to do her swift packing. She came back at ten o'clock and Donald had the mixed joy of watching her sit beside Marion, whose sisterly arm went about Sally's waist, while Helena played her guitar and sang soft Southern songs, looking like "a goddess dressed by Worth," as Jerry had once called her. Jim smoked his pipe, looking rather absent-minded, not so appreciative as an unattached young man should be of attractive girls, while Donald wanted to send them to bed, all but Sally, wanted to sweep all the world into the discard, leaving just their two selves, with the fire for consoler and interpreter.

But at least they had their moment in the morning. Sally and he were first downstairs, and the day was one for weddings rather than partings, a day of blue and gold, of warm sun and fresh breeze. They went down to the lake without a word, sat on the steps of the tiny boat-house where they were invisible from the camp. And Donald had a vivid realization that even their hour of unalloyed joy on the beach yesterday had not drawn them so close as this...

Yet she said at last: "Don, I almost wish I didn't care—Do you realize that New York is three hundred miles away from that hot lonesome Washington!"

He answered this without speech until Sally drew away, looking once more like the girl of warm sand and sun and day-dreams.

"Promise me, Sally, that you'll believe in our luck!

-That you'll touch the tip of that little white cloud up there—be your mad self, my happy Sally!"

She promised, gray eyes shining, lips curved, and that generous forehead, broad and white, which Don loved as much as he loved her youth, clear, unfurrowed. He held her chin between his two hands, and his young face was strong and intent as he looked into the wide blue-gray eyes, a look for remembrance and comforting when they should be apart. In their good-by kiss there was passion, untarnished youth, and more significant than either, the spirit of comradeship, of an enduring love rooted in understanding.

At the impressive new Union Station in Washington Sally was met neither by Anne nor the Doctor, as she had rather expected, but to her surprise by Geoffrey Kent, a big well-groomed Geoffrey, with already that air of quiet assurance which indicates experience and success.

He met her on the platform, secured her bag and umbrella, and hurried her out to a waiting carriage, not yet one of the taxi-cabs so soon to replace the old fashioned "hack" of Sally's early youth. It seemed that Donald had wired him the hour of her arrival, and she had a distinct sense of relief at finding herself in such competent hands. Geoff had already seen Dr. Dulaney and heard that Mrs. Dallam seemed better, perhaps because she had been told that Sally was to arrive within a few hours.

In the privacy of a shabby old Victoria, with the negro driver devoting his attention to a soporific and ancient steed, Geoff and Sally looked at each other shyly, and liked what they saw. After the moment of greeting, of question and answer concerning Mrs. Dallam, they fell into the old talk concerning their common interest, that desire to write, at once a bond of union and a bone of contention. For if Geoffrey contended that all roads led to Rome, Sally was convinced that the one way to become an able author was to write—to do nothing else—to work for style, technical skill, distinction of thought and phrase.

"And Geoff, I did hope you would plunge in, give up

the idea of engineering and go into newspaper work." Geoffrey looked at her thoughtfully, with eyes that plumbed beneath pleasant surfaces.

"But Sally, a man and a woman are in such different positions. A man has first of all to solve the practical problem of living. If he hasn't a family on his hands already, he hopes to marry, must have something to marry on! Solvent and middle-aged he may still write . . there's always the chance, the hope. But he needs first of all to earn a decent, adequate living."

"Can't he do that as a reporter or editor or as a free-lance, writing for the magazines?" asked Sally.

"He may—but it seems a hard row to hoe," said Geoff thoughtfully. And then he added unexpectedly:

"You see, Sally, because my father failed and then died, leaving Mother nothing but memories and an expensive son, I've felt that with me first of all this money business must be settled. I want to insure my wife's safety even before I marry her."

Sally's forehead wrinkled thoughtfully as she considered this:

"That sounds, Geoff, as though you'd already found her! Or is that taking a liberty?"

Geoffrey Kent smiled, and his rare smile lighted up his rugged face as a wood fire lights a lonely room.

"You couldn't do that, with me, Sally. Since that first Christmas you've been one of the few real people in my life."

They were drawing close to the little house near Du Pont Circle, and he added, with a hand on hers:

"Sally, if you need me, if I can do anything for you and your Mother, *anything*, I want to be called upon— Will you promise?"

Sally's hand clutched his tight; they were within a block of the atomic place she called home, and she felt a queer ache in her throat, fear, eagerness, longing.

"Of course, Geoff. And thank you. Oh, here it is!"

In another moment she was out, standing on the sidewalk under the little green maple tree, looking at the tiny frame house, freshly painted, home-like, beloved. Sally forgot Geoffrey, even Don, as she ran up the steps, opened the front door which gave to her hand, and sped on up the short stair. At the closed door of her mother's room she hesitated. Then she heard Anne reading aloud, and she knocked very gently. She heard Honor Dallam's cry: "It's Sally; my Sally!" and in another instant mother and daughter were in each other's arms.

One of Sally's letters to Donald written a week later will elucidate the situation regarding Mrs. Dallam:

"I've always loved and trusted Dr. Dulaney, and now I care for him more than ever. For he hasn't tried to deceive us, to make light of things. Mother isn't merely recovering from a low fever. He thinks there is need of an operation, but that she must rest and get strong before it can be safely performed. And we have told it to Mother—exactly the truth. So she is content too. And just as soon as she is strong enough we are to go to the seashore, probably Cape May, and stay out of doors ten hours a day. In October she is to have an extra month's leave and Dr. Dulaney and Dr. Waite, a surgeon he swears by, will put the thing through

"No, Don. I'm really not worrying. For I have confidence in Dr. Dulaney and he says there is every chance that she will come through safely and be stronger than she has been for several years.

"But one thing you may not like—I told Mother about Us, and she was lovely, just her blessedest self. But she does not want the engagement announced now, so long before we are able to marry. She says there is no man she would prefer to the son of dear Aunt Laura, but that she wants us to go slowly, to be absolutely sure of ourselves and of each other. I told her that we had gone slowly—having known each other nearly eleven years. But that irritated her: she's not quite herself, weak, easily tired. And she has this horror of a mistaken marriage ...

"So Don dear, please, please, wait, and trust me. And don't hint the truth to Jim or Marion. I am keeping things from even Anne, though I hate to. It is the first time, no, the second, that I have ever kept anything really important from Anne since I was fourteen."

Later she wrote:

"I can't tell you what a help your letters are, Don. Each one comes at exactly the hour in the day when I need it most.... The postman seems uncanny. Geoff, Anne, the Doctor, all my friends, are lovely, considerate, sending Mother things and Geoff coming to get me for a run in the evening while Anne sits with Mother. There are books, fruit, flowers, all manner of surprises for my invalid—she loves the proof of how many people care for her. And she is the goodest patient, as Prim would say. But for me, your letters seem to be the tonic I need. They give me strength, courage, even patience. Up there among those hills I was so dazzled by the white flame that after my return things looked black,—by contrast. There was one night—I stayed awake and thought about the operation—oh, it was a grim night anxiety, responsibility, when I wanted only youth, love, you! And it seemed to me I had a *right* to the joy all of me was crying for. I was angry with Fate, God perhaps.

"And then, the next morning, your letter. It was like that hour under the white birch, like the sound of the wind in the trees, like your voice and your touch."

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CHAPTER VII

DON GOES CANOEING

TO Donald, up at the camp, with that consciousness of each day's being incredibly empty now that Sally had gone, this last letter came like some magic elixir. Helena, lying back in the canoe that same evening, said to herself that for the first time this unappreciative young man was showing some interest in her existence. She had said some trifling nothing about marriage, Don asked a question, there followed quite an animated discussion. Was marriage folly for the young and impecunious? Or was it the finest wisdom, in many cases? Helena was insistent upon the vital necessity of romance. She was sure that the mating of two young people deeply in love was the most wonderful experience of life. She herself had missed this happiness . . . but no need to dwell upon her sad history.

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Donald did not wish to dwell upon anybody's sad history, he was quite literal and prosaic, casually inquiring how much Helena thought a young man ought to have before asking a woman to marry him. This, it seemed, was a poser, an unsolved riddle. It depended, Helena said, on what they both wanted out of life, and of course whether the girl had anything of her own. That made 'a difference. Yes, Donald could see that . . . And in the long late twilight—the moon had vanished with Sally—there was silence in the canoe while Don paddled, and Helena looked like the Lady of the Lake.

Just how it happened Donald hardly knew, but he found himself sitting beside Helena: she had suggested that he rest, had made room for him beside her, and now was saying in that soft voice of hers:

"Men are so queer about a woman's money—the fine ones, I mean. Of course the others . . . oh, well, one has one's experiences!"

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Donald, his mind on Sally in Washington, remarked absently:

"You mean . . ."

To his amazement her answer came in low intense tones:

"I mean, oh Don.— Many men have cared for me, but at last I am punished. Until to-night I was so afraid..."

What under Heaven did the woman mean? Don felt himself flushing in the soft luminous dusk, felt a hideous doubt, of her, himself... Then the thing happened which an hour ago he would have sworn could not happen, Helena was in his arms, he found himself kissing her, felt answering kisses. The episode was as sudden as a summer thunderstorm, and the climax came when Helena said:

"Don, darling, how happy Marion will be!"

But "Don darling" was at the moment remembering Sally's eyes and cursing his madness. He took his old seat and paddled rapidly toward home. And Helena sat there, lovely, assured, humming sweet minor melodies under her breath. At the wharf Don helped her out, secured the boat, then said quietly:

"Please wait a moment, Helena."

She dropped down on the step where Sally had sat, drew him down beside her. And she said, with that effect of accenting every other word.

"Oh, Don, I'm so happy, I never dreamed."

Donald took a strong grip upon those slim tapering fingers, a grip that hurt. He spoke with brutal sincerity:

"That's precisely my case, Helena! I 'never dreamed' either. And you have my apologies!"

She said with exquisite sweetness: "You're human, Don. And so am I. And if we love . . ."

"But we don't."

Helena sat straight, lifting her charming head with the pride of an Empress. At times there was a suggestion of melodrama in her gestures, in the very perfection of her beauty.

"What do you mean, Donald Graham!"

"I mean . . . My dear girl, I've acted like a silly ass. But nothing in the world was farther from my mind when we came out. Forgive me—let's forget it!"

She sat in frozen silence, while Donald found himself absurdly shaky, embarrassed, more than ever conscious of her difference from the women he knew best. Suddenly he remembered that Jim had seemed to avoid tête-à-têtes with this ravishing young person. Jim was a wise bird! And it was peculiar that you could kiss a woman one moment and almost hate her the next. He had heard men say things, queer ugly things about certain women, and had disbelieved them, disliked the men. In a flash it came over him now that the very decency and cleanness of a young man's life may put him at a disadvantage. And Sally—would Sally understand an episode like this?

He became conscious then that Helena was laughing. "Don, I really frightened you. You thought me

serious!"

His own laugh held relief, he put his hand out boyishly.

"Thank God you weren't!"

The hand that he had taken curled around his; Helena smiled divinely into his eyes.

"Responsibility is ugly, Don, for a young man with his way to make. I do understand! But we're both young; for a little while I can make you happy—and nobody need know—we're not children . . ."

Donald felt a sudden stunned relief. At last she seemed to him absolutely natural, no longer playing a part.

With this amazing young woman beside him, dazzling, attainable, thought came to him in flashes. When he had asked Sally to marry him he had half-consciously assumed that the unrest, the danger, the wild moods of youth would be past. He had felt safe from his baser self, the lawless impulses which are any man's heritage from the primordial brute. For he loved Sally, every atom of him belonged to her. And yet this woman's wantonness had an extraordinary appeal. He was acutely conscious not only of her physical perfection, but of that subtler something which drew him as a magnet draws a bit of steel.

ris thoughts raced, visualized experience, adventure —and then the rainbow-colored word itself evoked a vision of Sally the little girl, then of Sally as she had looked in this very spot, under a shower of white moonlight.

He got up abruptly, stood for an instant looking down at Helena with quizzical lips and rather hard eyes behind the curved lens of his glasses.

"'You're talking rot, Helena. You see, I happen to be in love with another woman . . . whom I hope to marry."

For one unforgettable instant he caught a glimpse of a feline spirit beneath the miracle of her beauty. She cried sharply:

"It's that little fool, Sally!"

Then they were walking quietly to the camp, through the tall pines, into the open around the house. From the living-room Marion called to them . . .

The next day occurred one of those coincidences which now and then cut our Gordian knots. A telegram stated that one of the draftsmen in Donald's office was ill: could he postpone his last week of vacation and come on at once?

Within twenty-four hours he was back in New York, looking out of a window high above Park Avenue, hoping within himself that he had dreamed Helena. The letters crowded into his coat pocket convinced him that Sally was real.

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE HOSPITAL STEPS

I was one of those October days when Washington is as sparkling as the wit of Bernard Shaw, restful as Chopin played by a poet. In the warm sunshine Sally Dallam sat on the steps of a big dreary hospital while inside the surgeons were doing their work.

As she waited, Sally's thoughts went forward and back, dwelling painfully upon an old puzzle which always recurred to her when facing the fact of danger If they believed in Heaven why did church or death. people still continue to fear death for themselves and passionately mourn their beloved dead? The break must mean shock, acute pain, but why should those fortunate Christians suffer enduring anguish, that sense of dreadful finality, which death usually means, and should not mean, to believers in immortality. She wondered whether it were quite real-this faith of which one heard so much-and then she remembered her mother. Assuredly Honor Dallam was one of those people who really believe the creeds they profess. And after all she might be right: in the deeper sense there might be no death.

Yet in that hour of waiting the youth in Sally, passionately loving, intolerant of pain, answered her own question as to the sorrow and fear of those Christians whom she would have interrogated. For the intangible invisible spirit of Honor Dallam was not enough. Sally wanted the living Mother she knew, of warm embraces, smiles and tears, little weaknesses, vivid personal charm. She wanted to touch, to hold, to caress . . . After all those church people she criticized were not so strange. Despite their faith they were very human—and the broken lives they saw must be more real to them, in weak moments, than the renewal and reunion which only their spiritual eyes might foresee.

She found that she was apparently taking tragedy for granted, and dashing away the humiliating tears, she forced her mind to plan for the future of a well but weary Honor Dallam.

Her own chosen work, even marrying Don, these must wait while she learned the lesson which Geoffrey Kent was forcing upon himself, complete self-dependence for the sake of others. And Geoffrey might be right. If you had the thing in you, the true creative spark, even difficulties, obstacles, might ultimately fan it into flame. At any rate her duty to-morrow was obvious, if in any real sense there was to be a to-morrow.

Suddenly Anne was beside her, laughing at her wet face, the whimsical and charming Anne who had been friend, sister, confidante for so many years.

"You old silly Sally! Dreaming nightmares when it's bright daylight! Father told me to tell you everything's all right: your Mother is going to get well! And she's coming out of the ether beautifully . . . "

Sally saw black for a long moment, felt that she was escaping forever from pain, but Anne's firm hand kept a grip on hers, and that clear voice rang in her ears:

"Sally, don't you *dare* to faint!" Sally shakily begged Anne's pardon and said that she wouldn't think of it, that she was very much obliged. and that:

"Oh, Anne, Anne, Anne, I have been so afraid-so hideously afraid! It's so terrible when it's your Mother, your own Mother!"

Anne did a rare thing, for her. She drew Sally close, kissed her on the lips.

"Darling Sally, I know. Oh, I know!"

And then Sally remembered that Anne did indeed know, had known even before she had met Sally first. at school. She asked herself how people endured the unendurable things that happened-one of those questions which remain forever unanswered.

A week later in the pleasant library of the Graham house on Highland Place Sally asked the Senator to help her to get a Government position. Long ago when he had been in Congress he had done this for Honor Dallam, and now the girl came fearlessly to her old friend, sure that he would not fail her.

The Senator's eyes under overhanging shaggy eyebrows surveyed the young head beneath its small trim hat of dark blue velvet, the waves of burnished brown hair, the smooth soft cheeks. wide eyes and delicately squared chin. He whistled softly, for he was really shocked, and it seemed more courteous to whistle than to swear:

"Why Sara, I thought you were writing clever articles, nice little poems. My sons have been bragging about their gifted young friend! Why on earth should you go into a musty office, write in dull books or knock out platitudes on a typewriter?" Sally laid a firm hand on the Senator's coat sleeve.

"Mother has worked in one of those dreary offices for fifteen years! And my articles and verses bring in quite a lot of glory but mighty little hard cash. So far as I can see it's a choice between a position as a reporter on a newspaper in Washington or Baltimore and the Government. The latter is surer, and I can be with Mother. Ah, Uncle Jim, do be good and help me!"

The Senator was extremely fond of Sally, and deep in him was the unspoken hope that some day she might even make a very charming member of his own family. And he said now with sudden ferocity:

"Where's the young man, Sara Dallam? That's what I want to know?"

"Where is what young man, Uncle Jim?"

"The man you're going to marry—your young man! A Government Office is no place for a girl like you—all bloom and youth and vitality!"

Sally's blush embarrassed her horribly and gave the Senator acute masculine satisfaction.

"Then there is a young man. I thought so!"

Sally looked him straight between the eyes. "There is, Uncle Jim. Only it's a secret! He can't support me for years, much less Mother. I'm foolishly happy, but it's up to me to work for my living. Please be a darling and *help push!* I can pass the Civil Service Examination I think, but you know influence counts!" The Senator sighed. "It does, Sally. And if I must, I must." But I don't like it."

His shaggy eyebrows were twisted and his face lined. He looked suddenly older; Sally wondered why. Actually her words were uprooting that secret hope of his. Apparently he was not to have this girl for a daughter, this girl he knew and trusted, whose character and antecedents and health were all satisfactory. And by Jove, a little girl he loved! Of course if the man she cared for were either Don or Jim he would have been taken into their confidence. His boys trusted him, knew that he could be counted on to understand and, as Sally put it, "help push." Well, she was a fine girl, and he would do what he could. But he had a poor opinion of her young man, letting a lovely live thing like that get into an infernal treadmill!

It was a satisfactory interview, from Sally's viewpoint. Yet curiously enough she went home a little sad, and that night she had a strange dream. She seemed to be wandering in a wild windy forest, the sound of the sea somewhere, a glorious bass to the high sweet soprano of the wind in the pines. And then abruptly a giant hand shut down upon her, shut out the sight of the slim tree trunks against the sky, of fluttering leaves, shut from her ears the sound of the vast orchestra, lifted her and took her to a still airless prison. And in that prison one could not dream brave dreams nor hear wild music; in that prison there was no time to hunt for that treasure, the perfect word fitting into its place like the missing bit of a puzzle . . . Sally woke suddenly, sat up in bed, stared at the door of her mother's room.

She slipped out of bed, went through the door, noiseless and eager, dropped down on her knees beside the sleeper. She could see the oval face dimly by the light of a street lamp shining through the little maple tree in front of the house, could see the strong features, the color, fainter than it used to be, the little lines crisscrossing the fine forehead, touching the brave lips. The heavy golden-brown hair was still un-silvered, and lay in a loose braid on the pillow; yet this was an older Honor Dallam, worn and thin featured, and Sally looked at her a long time. If she could but bring back some of the old resilience and buoyancy—surely an office need not be a prison, when one had a mother like this, with youth and love, and the insistent hunger to create something beautiful out of words, fancies memories, even from those grim moments when one faced the possibility of gray defeat. She went back to bed, comforted.

To pay one's debt to love, even a little of that debt, how wonderful it might be! With this thought in her mind she fell asleep.

CHAPTER IX

WITH GEOFFREY IN THE FIRELIGHT

A S often happens in this illogical world Sally found that the action which satisfied her own conscience seemed to others utterly discordant and wrong. She told Anne what she had done, and Anne said crossly:

"Sally Dallam, it's absurd, your going into a Government office. If you worked harder at your articles, sent them everywhere, bombarded the editors of the Sunday papers and the magazines, I believe you could make enough by work you enjoy, work that belongs to you. I hate your giving up like this."

"But I'm only making sure of a living, Anne, not giving up! After I've shaken into my own little rut I'll find time to write Sundays and in the evening. As Geoffrey says any writer's assets are the sum of what he experiences and what he imagines. So nothing is lost. And for all you know my first novel may center around department life in Washington, with a heroine as marvelous to look at as Marion's Helena, plus a few triffing qualities which Helena seems to lack!"

But Anne was not to be cajoled into discussing a side issue like Helena.

"People always talk that way—about what they're going to do on the side—and it usually ends in talk. If you go into that old office you'll never write a novel, or anything else worth while. And you'll never marry the right man, or do anything you should do. I hate the whole thing!"

Sally longed to tell Anne about Don, indeed it seemed wholly unfair not to have told her weeks ago, upon her own return to Washington. But her mother's attitude was usually so generous that the girl felt the more bound to respect this queer whim, especially when she knew that Honor Dallam would intensely dislike the department project. Yet one person she was sure would approve, and this was Geoffrey Kent. He came in one evening soon after Sally and Mrs. Dallam had returned from a fortnight at Cape May. During those few days Sally had secretly taken the Civil Service Examinations, and she felt sure she had passed with credit. Her plan was that her mother should retain her own position for a few months, but ultimately resign and take Sally's place as manager of the tiny household.

Now as Geoffrey Kent sat in her wing chair and stared rather moodily into her sputtering wood fire, Sally decided that he would make a satisfactory confidant. So she told him of her interview with the Senator, her subsequent examination only the day before yesterday, and of the Senator's assurance that if she had passed satisfactorily she would soon have an appointment. And then she was amazed at the expression of the lean strong face. Geoffrey's eyes left the fire, met her own, glowed with some strong emotion, his whole look that of a man confronted by some tense crisis in his life.

"It's a hideous idea—like caging some wild bird! And if—Sally,—if there is no one who has the right to interfere, then I demand that right!"

She stared at him in sheer astonishment.

He looked much as he had looked that Christmas years ago, shy, a little awkward, yet with a sort of passionate clarity both of feeling and expression.

"I mean I want to marry you! Since that first Christmas Eve I've cared for nobody but Sally Dallam."

"But Geoff . . . you've never said a word . . . even in your letters. . . I don't understand!"

"It's simple enough, a hackneyed situation seen in any novel or play! Donald is my closest friend and for years I've been sure he cared for you—that he himself didn't realize how much. So the only thing for me to do was to keep away. But now that he is back, now that you have seen him and he has had his chance—Ah, Sally! Tell me that you too—have waited. . . ."

Sally, who loved many people in many ways, was conscious first of sheer sickening pain. It was worse even than that experience with Shelley. For she cared for Geoff, had always cared for him with a keen, eager appreciation of his talent, his hardy adventurous spirit, which yet possessed none of Donald's temperamental joyousness, none of that something in Jim which gave him delight in his difficult profession. Always Geoffrey had seemed to her apart from the others, lonely, aloof yet curiously self-confident, almost self-sufficient. And now this rending of the veil showed her a new Geoffrey, a man capable of love, of tenderness, possibly even of that glowing happines in which Sally believed as ardently as many women believe a creed.

She leaned forward, laid her hand over his:

"Geoffrey, I'm so sorry! I do care for you—in my own queer way I love you, have always loved you. But there is another man—I suppose there's always been..."

Kent sat quite still, his face like stone, rigid, devoid of all sign of feeling. Yet she felt the hand under her own tremble, and then poor Sally was conscious of weeks of strain, she felt ill, worn, discouraged. She put her head down and sobbed as she had sobbed long ago when another woman had failed Alfred Buchanan. Now she was hurting her own friend, this man whose happiness she keenly desired.

After a little the world seemed quite still save for the sputtering of the dry wood on the hearth. Geoffrey still held her hand, and after a little he touched it with his lips.

"'Don't cry, Sally. I think I knew how it must be, that I have always known. Do you mind telling me whether the man is Don?"

Sally told him then, the story of the camp, of the revival of an old friendship, and finally of her actual engagement, the fact that only her Mother's unexpected attitude had prevented its announcement weeks ago.

When she had finished he sat staring into the fire, and Sally saw the things about him which she had liked years ago, the look of refinement despite a simplicity which had then almost amounted to awkwardness, the long tapering hands which yet were so strong, the hint ۱

of sensitiveness in the clear cutting of lips and nostrils and eyelids, the aquiline, finely proportioned profile. He was larger than the youth she had first known, with a look of endurance and vitality and that something about him often noticeable in men who live much in the open, a look of reserve and quiet power. And his wellmade, well-fitting clothes not only suggested greater financial ease but also a certain critical discrimination which the younger Geoff had seemed to lack.

Presently he said: "You see, it seemed the logical time to 'propose', Sally. I've just had an increase in salary, also a chance to enter a firm of engineers in Philadelphia. It's a young firm but already getting important contracts. I could take care of you and your Mother,—give you some of those things a man wants to give his young wife. But it had to be—Don. And as he is the best friend I've ever had why should I wonder that you love him?"

Sally sat erect, recovered her hand.

"Geoff, when this sort of thing happens a girl usually loses her friend, because she can't marry him. That always seems such sheer waste. And ever since Don brought you home that first time you've meant a great deal to me,—your mind, your outlook. And now— Geoff dear, isn't my friendship a thing worth having, of itself?"

Even at that moment Kent could smile at her intensity, at that vivid enthusiasm which he realized was not merely a phase of Sally's youth but deeply ingrained in her nature.

"Sally, if you cared for Don but knew he was in love with another woman, could you go on seeing him constantly—could you be as damnably sensible as you expect me to be?"

Her color burned but her eyes met his frankly.

"It might be hard, for a while. But, I think I'd try to hold on to his friendship, to keep my feeling for him generous and fine!"

She hesitated, while Geoffrey sat still, watching her. She went on swiftly:

"Geoff, years ago you and I agreed that novelists

lay too much stress on one kind of love—I still feel that it's true. After all, our lives, our characters, even our happiness, are made by many people, not just by those we're in love with . . . Because I'm going to marry I don't want to lose my friends. Surely this passion people write about perpetually isn't everything!"

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As she spoke she remembered the boy Don's impetuous speech long ago to that same effect, and then wished she hadn't spoken so to Geoffrey. When you possess a thing it is so easy to make light of its value. But his face was set, impassive, and she cried:

"Geoff, I do care so much. Let me give you what I can, interest, affection, this ambition I have for you and your work, not the work you're doing but the things you're going to write. I'll hate myself if I'm not big enough to keep you, always!"

He began to prowl about the room, not answering her for the moment, while the fire snapped and chuckled and Sally recalled that morning on the beach, with Don. Suppose he hadn't cared for her, completely, more than for any one else. That thought sharpened her perception of what Geoffrey was feeling.

For a strange moment she seemed to see ahead, to know that in some place, at some time, Geoffrey Kent was going to count very greatly in her life. But with this curious prescience came a sense of some illimitable anguish. For a second she was dizzy, obsessed by a terror she could not understand. Then her vision cleared, she saw the fire, saw Geoffrey's face, came back to the blessed present with a sigh of relief. And Geoffrey sat down beside her and said deliberately:

"Of course you're right, Sally. A man's a fool who refuses any gift of the gods, even though it's not the one he's asked for. Life's a bigger thing than one love, one single success or failure. As to writing—I've already written my first book, had it accepted by the second publisher who saw it. You may be sure I'm going on, now that I've made a start."

"Geoff, I'm glad, so glad!" She spoke the truth and yet knew a secret illogical pang of envy. For he had leaped ahead of her in the long race. She and Don touched the skirts of happiness, yet this fact could not banish her longing for that shining dream she had had as a child, the dream of writing books as wonderful as those which small Sally Dallam had read and loved with the concentrated passion of a lonely little bookworm. She said finally:

"Then you're going to give up this foolish engineering and do nothing but write? Promise, Geoffrey."

He laughed.

"My dear Sally, don't you know why I went into engineering, why I wanted money?"

"So you could feel safe, able to—" she paused, recollecting another conversation on the day of her return.

"Yes, Sally Dallam. You are the possible wife I've planned and worked for, in spite of the fear that it might be Donald, after all, whom you'd marry. For years you've colored my thoughts, influenced most of my acts."

Sally lifted her hands in a gesture of appeal as he went on steadily, in that quiet monotone:

"But I've waked from that dream now, and there's still work, thank God! So you're promptly to forget this talk—we'll bury the subject forever!"

The clock struck eleven and he added cheerfully, "Yes, I'm going, old spoil-sport! And Sally, I still don't like the Government idea. But knowing about Don changes the situation. He won't let a routine job swallow your youth. I know Don! And one thing more..."

"Yes, Geoff?"

"If there had to be another man, he's the one I'd have chosen for you—the best there is!"

Sally remembered Shelley Israels; he had used some such phrase about her. Curious, this illogical love of men for women who could not respond, queer and wasteful and beautiful. She said at last:

"That's like you, Geoff! And if it hadn't been Don . . ." she broke off, shivered uncontrollably, and Geoffrey understood. "Life just isn't imaginable without Don. Is that it, Sally?"

She deliberately kissed him.

"Dear Geoff, you're kinder, stronger, bigger than I could possibly be!"

He kissed her again, on the lips, a hard, almost a fierce kiss. and then was gone.

Without him the firelit room was strange and lonely. Sally gave a short half angry sob, shook the tears from her eyes, then went to her desk and swiftly abstracted a handful of letters from a secret drawer. Half an hour later she was still there by the fire, reading, remembering, dreaming of that perfect possession, hers and Don's, the illimitable future.

CHAPTER X

ANNE AND SALLY

A T this period the wide smooth streets of Washington lent themselves to a public who for a brief season rode bicycles with an ardor later transferred to the all-conquering automobile. This however was the early phase; as yet only the opulent or the adventurous owned their own cars, but Sally rode her wheel to the office each morning with a zest which did much to mitigate the monotony of her new life.

Anne rode also, and often she met Sally between four and five, and the two either sat on a park bench and discoursed of themselves and their lives, or sped to some spot beyond the city limits, the exercise waking in both the old joy in merely being alive.

Anne was keeping house for her father, not an arduous task, with old devoted servants to make life smooth for the girl whom they all loved; she was also working at her music, and now sang in the choir of one of the most popular and attractive of the old Washington churches, with an occasional venture into concert work. The Doctor, however, condoned the choir and objected to the concerts, Anne storming at his "old-fashioned pigheaded conservatism," and in the main doing very much as he wanted her to do.

As she told Sally:

"After all he slaves over his patients so that he needs me to look after him, and if I got an engagement to tour the country I'd be worried about him every minute."

"What will he do when you marry?" said Sally, on this particular occasion, a shining midwinter day as warm as October, when she and Anne had met after office hours in Lafayette Square. They were riding slowly out toward Rock Creek Park, keeping close together so that conversation might be possible. "Not when, but *if*," was Anne's reply. "After all, Sally, it's always been you who said 'when I marry,' and you would have done it even if there had been—no Don!"

For by this time Anne had been initiated into the secret, although she and Mrs. Graham were the only favored ones, besides the Doctor and Geoffrey. Yet the frank correspondence, Donald's gifts of books, his flying visits, all on top of the old family intimacy, had suggested to most of Sally's friends the probable outcome of the affair, although in tolerant Southern fashion nobody demanded to be told detailed facts and possible dates.

The girls dismounted, having reached a long steep hill, and Sally said dreamily:

"All right. If, then. But Anne, it's rather wonderful, having some one to plan things with, some one whose success is your success, and whose hopes are your hopes. I do wish you'd marry—Geoffrey. Or Jim!"

Anne, boyishly slim in her coat and skirt of heavy blue cloth, seemed to hesitate for an instant before she She was at this period of her young womanreplied. hood peculiarly graceful in every movement, every pose, while her eloquent crimson-lipped mouth, fine grained skin of a luminous whiteness and beautiful dark eves under a wide brow, the fairer for the cloud of black hair parting as wings part, combined to produce an effect which, if not of flawless beauty, was yet singularly attractive. Few women and no men could see her without genuine admiration and an interest which passed beyond the threshold of mere physical attractiveness into the wider realm of personality To others besides Sally, Anne was a personage, provocative and lovable, while her mental processes were always interesting, the more so as even with her chosen friends she was rather impersonal, at times reticent.

She said now: "Sally, I'd hate you to catch Marion's matchmaking germ! Because you're engaged, for Heaven's sake don't insist that every friend you possess follow suit!"

Sally was distinctly irritated.

"I beg your pardon, Anne! I haven't the faintest desire to marry you off. I simply want the people I love most to be happy, and you are one of them! But if you're happier as you are, I'm content."

Anne laughed, caught Sally about the waist and said: "Sally, Sally—getting cross about nothing at all!" She added in a different voice: "I suppose I should have been married off by a worldly mother in my teens, before I grew introspective, critical. As things are the fact that a man is in love with me seems a reason for my finding him insufferably dull!"

Sally leaned her wheel against a tree and caught Anne by the shoulders. "You mean something by that! There's some one—some stupid man-thing who doesn't really know you—whom you care for . . . Oh, Anne, who is he?"

This time it was Anne who flushed to the roots of her hair and turned upon Sally reproachful eyes. Her full lips were close set. At such a moment one could hardly guess how sweet that red mouth might be, how tender, how warmly passionate. But the eyes revealed what the lips denied, and Sally hugged her close, thankful for the isolation of the little wood through which they were passing.

"Anne, tell me who it is?" But Anne answered hotly,

"I'll tell you nothing of the sort, Sally Dallam! It's bad enough to have you realize that I am a fool, without your knowing how and when and who!" And then, illogically, she put Sally's two arms around her slim little figure, pressed her cheek against Sally's cheek and said, in a low voice:

"Sally, my darling, I want you to be happy, I'm glad you're happy! Glad that it's Don and nobody else. But sometimes you make me terribly lonesome! For oh, Sally, there is somebody, strong, blind, lovable, and I never go to bed at night or get up in the morning without the horrid fear that perhaps he has found the girl he can love, the girl who isn't me!"

Sally's face burned, anger tingled through her. She caught her friend's hand.

"Whoever he is I hate him for a dull fool! I wish I could—operate on his optical nerve!"

Anne laughed, squeezed Sally's hand, dropped it, and straightened her hat, saying grimly: "There's nothing the matter with his eyesight. The trouble's with me, I've never been able to persuade him that I exist, the real I, known to Sally Dallam and Dad. The chances are I never can. So I'll have to make my life without him—and I'll manage it, somehow. After all there is a good deal left!"

"I should think so! Why, I've always thought you the luckiest girl I know!"

"So I am," said Anne sturdily. "But come, here's a hill to coast. And remember, so long as you live not one word of this... no matter what happens, no matter what I do or don't do! Whether I remain a spinster all my days or marry the Czar of Russia or the King of Siam!"

"Cross my heart," said Sally. "But Anne, if I just knew who he is I might help!"

Anne tilted her brows and shrugged her shoulders.

"You can't know and you can't help—except by just forgetting everything I've said, and loving me harder than you've ever loved me before."

"I don't know how to do that, Nancy darling! And I can't 'forget.' But I'll hold my tongue."

"Always, even to me? Unless I open the subject." "Always dear, even to you."

For an instant they stood with hands clasped, on the peak of a long hill down which a road curved smooth and inviting, in a brown and gray world, wintry without winter's icy chill, and with not a living thing in sight. Then they mounted their waiting steeds of steel and glided down, at first slowly, then with increasing speed. For ten singing moments they were as free and swift and happy as birds swooping down blue hills of sky.

That same Sunday evening Anne, the Doctor, Jim Graham and Geoffrey Kent took tea with Sally and her mother in the tiny house. There was good talk, excellent hot biscuit and sponge cake fit for the gods, and if Sally's days were dulled by her routine work and by her longing for one person far from Washington, she looked neither overworked nor disconsolate.

Dulancy turned to Honor with a smile as the two sat by the fire and listened to the gusts of talk and laughter.

"Those girls—there are no sweeter or lovelier in this town, Honor Dallam. I hope to God we can keep them as happy as they are to-night!"

But Honor looked at him with thoughtful eyes. "I wonder, Doctor! We see the smooth bright surface, the sunny side up. But, even in the heyday of youth, Life has its gray days, its unspoken longings, its unattainable joys."

"Meaning just what, oh wisest of women?"

But Honor did not tell him. Only to herself she said: "Sally is longing for Donald, chafing under the separation, Geoffrey is trying to convince himself that since Sally belongs to another man he must stop loving her, Jim is talking to Anne about diseases of the throat —he's the only one really content, Jim, while Anne—"

Here the Doctor interrupted her soliloquy, and she answered him brightly, but under the brightness she was saying to herself: "Plucky child! Yet if it is just Geoffrey there is a chance of things coming right. Men are caught on the rebound; it is only women who continue to love without reason or logic or egoism!"

About this time Sally wrote to Donald:

"If sometimes my letters seem niggardly, realize, Don darling, that I'm busier than I have ever been and that I haven't yet learned how to manage the time I actually have to myself. But I am perfectly well, for the routine I expected to hate seems to make possible an abnormal amount of eating and sleeping or perhaps the rides on my wheel may account for the fact that I am as fit as a prize fighter.

"I shall have to confess, however, that when it comes to writing masterpieces, which I meant to accomplish evenings and Sundays, I am an arrant fraud! I write nothing—save the office work and my letters to you. And it isn't the office, or 'home duties' which interfere, or even these letters. But just people, the old foolish delight in seeing every friend I have as often as possible, and talking like mad upon every possible and impossible subject. Anne and I get positively drunk on talk! John still trots about in Anne's wake like a big Newfoundland dog, devoted and awkward. You know he was her first lover, and he seems to outlast all the others, so that now and then one wonders. . . . And yet one doesn't either. For John is too stolid for Anne, she always knows where to find him and what he is going to say, and Anne at heart is an adventurer. She wants to wonder now and then what is going to happen next. Her husband should be an army officer or a sea captain or a surgeon, whose next move you can't possibly foretell. She used to say that being a doctor's daughter should warn any woman against marrying a physician just as she would shun the germ of T. B. or typhoid, since all physicians and their wives are slaves, with no time nor vitality nor souls of their own, 'martyrs to the telephone, the door bell and the Golden Rule!' Yet actually Anne won't notice a man who isn't doing some sort of work that demands every ounce of his vitality. She likes Jim and Geoffrey and the gentleman I hope to marry because she says 'they haven't time to tag about women all day and drink with men all night.' Yet even Anne gets a certain satisfaction from being 'tagged' occasionally. She tries to marry off John to any pleasant new girl who comes along, but between you and me I think she takes secret satisfaction in the fact that she stands for the entire sex in John's eves. But I wish he were an explorer or an inventor instead of a real estate agent."

Donald's reply to this led Sally into further communications concerning Anne and her lovers, actual and potential:

"You say you wonder why Jim and Anne don't follow our lead -frankly I also have wondered. They are splendid friends, always discussing Jim's latest case, reading the same books, and when she sings to him Jim has a funny abstracted look, as though he were trying to dovetail the music of 'The Night Has A Thousand Eyes' with the essential principles of abdominal surgery. I don't believe Jim would listen more than five minutes to any woman's singing any song, save only Anne. That brother of yours is impatient of what he calls 'fluffiness' and as a rule he seems to imagine that the arts, as interpreted by women anyhow, come under that head. But he surely admires Anne, her competence, her reticence, her personality, although he doesn't really know how lovely she is. But that isn't unusual. Men marry women every day, and haven't any true appreciation of their beauty. For instance I know that Anne has the loveliest eyelids and the most beautiful little chin in the world, but you men see only her obvious grace, the fact that she has dark hair and eyes and a fair skin. Subtle beauties you miss, most of you; it takes a woman to perceive another woman's fine points, physical and spiritual. Often, Donald, your sex irritates me! So many of you are dull. And it is generally the cleverest of you who are dullest!

"As to Geoffrey, he is still in town, his work has something to do with planning a number of new state roads, and he is writing a good deal on the side. He doesn't fritter his ideas away in idle chatter and endless letters! He informed me the other day that, if I put into writing the vitality I used in talking to my friends, I could write novels which people would buy and read. Mother was in the room, and she looked up from a note she was writing at my desk and said:

"'Oh Geoff, don't make the child calculating and economical yet! Let her love people so hard, live so intensely that when she's as old as I am she will have treasure to remember, to gloat over. Perhaps then she may write. Now I want her to get every thrill there is in just being a girl.'

"Wasn't that exactly like Mother? And what do you suppose Geoff did? He crossed the room and put his arms around her. I heard him say in a queer low voice: 'Mrs. Dallam, that was the sort of thing my own Mother would have said, if she had owned a Sally. And of course you're both right.'

"Don, it's somehow terrible the way Mother covets the stars in the sky and all the joys of Heaven and Earth for this silly Sally of hers—and yours. And the way Geoff remembers, the feeling he has for his mother, as if she were living, still making his life. He is a very big person, this friend of yours. And I sometimes think Mother loves him as she would have loved the little brother of mine who died when I was two years old and he was four.

"No, you need not be jealous. She cares for you quite as much as is good for you, for Aunt Laura's sake and my sake and —well, because you are you. . . Oh, Don, I hate writing things! I want to say them, with my cheek against that fuzzy gray coat of yours. I want you here, in Washington, not off there in that great cold strange city. I'm afraid of it, and there are times when I feel weak and rebellious, when I want to beg you to come and settle in Washington, near the people we both love best...in a blessed little pond where we'll both be fair sized fish instead of atomic minnows in the ocean of New York!

"Yet this is just a mood, Belovedest! I wouldn't sway you from that ambition which is part of you for anything on earth.... But the waiting is not easy. Though letters help sometimes they hurt, too. And this capacity for happiness which we both have is beautiful and dreadful, because it has a terrible twim—Yet I meet people who are so calm and self-contained; they don't get the sort of sheer rapture we get, from being together, and alive.... They don't stand on peaks of beauty with all the sky and all the sea and all the earth utterly their own ...nor write anybody such letters as you write me, letters that lift me on wings of fire and wonder, leaving me glad that I was born, that I live, that you love me ...

"But then probably *they* don't wake in the night and wonder what Life would be like if God took away love . . . it's the same old thing, Don. At thirteen there was only one thing I feared, not the dog that might bite *me* and then go mad, but the thing that might happen to some one else, some one beloved . . .

"The other day newsboys in the street were shouting 'Extra,

Extra,' and something about 'New York.' And Don, my darling, a funny sharp needle seemed to prick my very heart... if it meant something had happened to you... it was five minutes before I could breathe quite right, and then when I got the paper there was something about the Stock Exchange, a rampage of Bulls or Bears or something fierce and carnivorous... I laughed at silly Sally, but even laughing hurt!"

IN THE OFFICE

T HAT was a full and wearing winter. For the most part Sally was too busy for analysis or introspection but, after a life of entire freedom from routine, keeping office hours was a strain, and the pleasure of people in the evening could not detract from her fatigue when she was overtired and depressed the next day.

Anne and other of her friends she saw constantly, but it seemed to her that every friend she had was that winter facing some vital emotional problem. Anne was a proud little person, regarded usually as gay, independent, self-sufficient, but Sally knew the pain beneath the pride and she made it a point to see more of Anne than usual.

But Anne had nothing to do with one of those experiences which came to Sally out of the blue, possibly sent to modify her temperamental optimism concerning the unknown quantity we so glibly describe as "human nature."

She had been working now in her particular niche in the vast edifice of governmental activities for some seven months, having persuaded her mother to take a full year of rest. Thus far the younger woman's experience had been on the whole agreeable, if not exciting. Her chief was a quiet elderly man; Sally was practically his private secretary, although nominally something quite different on the pay roll, and she had developed a talent for getting out well-phrased letters which flattered her superior and were no less effective because they were not the product of literal dictation. As it happened Mr. Truro dictated with an almost unbelievable awkwardness. He was a nervous man whose ability manifested itself in excellent judgment and insight. He had also a New England conscience that forbade such shirking and procrastination as occur frequently in the domain of Uncle Sam. And Sally happened to be an assistant possessing what her superior lacked, a faculty for verbal expression, and affairs in Truro's office went well of late. So well indeed that Sally was sent for by Truro's immediate superior-a Divison Chief of power and authority-and asked if she would consent to do a little extra night work two evenings a week. The person who put this request was younger than Truro and a very different type of official, a college bred man, wholly unlike one's notion of a Goverment clerk, really brilliant, very tall, with heavy yellow hair, a hawk-like nose, a resolute chin and a mouth too curved, too red and too smiling, but which none the less could shut like a vise. Sally liked the chin, and even the big beak-like nose, liked too the thick blond hair in a world which even at this period seemed filling up with men possessed of many virtues but little hair. Also, being eager to make good in this sternly practical world, she felt distinctly flattered by the request.

She said: "Yes, Mr. Wade, I'll try," and the first evening for this extra work was named. It seemed that Wade was writing a book upon departmental procedure, a book which might increase the general efficiency of the force and at the same time count as a feather in his own official cap, and Sally knew that with her training she might prove an invaluable ally. The price he named was generous, she was to help arrange the material, the final typing to be done outside the office, and as Wade's plan was simple and his ability genuine Sally really enjoyed her two busy evenings each week, although Mrs. Dallam and Anne grumbled and Geoffrey insisted that if she edited anybody's work it should be her own.

But Sally that winter was like a young thoroughbred with the bit caught between her teeth. She wanted her own way, wanted to test her own strength of body and will, above all desired to earn and to save, and she was doing both, thanks to Honor's excellent management of the little income.

So she insisted that if she was not writing any fresh

articles or verse she was becoming a practical person, learning a great many things which "high-brow" authors should know and usually don't, and the satisfaction of helping to shape Wade's little volume more than atoned for the extra work.

One evening in March she had dinner with Anne and the Doctor and rode back to the office on her wheel. When she reached the big quiet room in the vast building, practically empty save for the ministrations of scrub women, she found that Wade had not come, and at once fell to work upon the mass of notes and uncorrected manuscript. She had a letter from Don in her pocket, Anne had given her a good dinner and there had been other guests and keen talk, so Sally was happy, alive from her bright hair to her shapely feet.

She worked steadily and deftly, and presently heard Wade in the outer office. He came in, immaculately clad, ruddy from the wind, and she smiled at him over the pages of manuscript, and went on with her work. He took up the sheets she had corrected, page by page, and presently rose to open a window. Sally and he had discovered a common passion; they both cared for air, a great deal of air, and during those evenings together were wont to work in what was sometimes a gale of wind.

The girl put a hand up to her ruffled hair, tucked in a hairpin, and went on reading, only to be astonished by the first personal remark she had ever heard from her employer. He said now in his deep, pleasant voice:

"Let it alone, Miss Sally. When the wind rumples your hair you stop looking like a chilly Diana and become yourself—a wood nymph running a typewriter."

Astonished, she looked up, but the profile she saw, virile and serious, was bent over a page of manuscript. Sally decided that Mr. Wade was merely thinking aloud. His speech would not have surprised her on the lips of the elderly Truro, who was from South Carolina and quite given to flowery personalities. Still even Wade was over forty; to him Sally was merely a pleasant useful young person. So she made no comment, beyond a smile, and went to her machine with a handful of corrected copy.

Twenty minutes later she looked up to ask a question. "Mr. Wade, just what do you mean by this?" And she began to read aloud.

When she waited, glancing up, Wade rose from his chair and came over to her desk. She noticed that his face was a little flushed, that his large eyes, brown and beautiful in shape and color, were very brilliant. He came to her side, glanced at the paper, and then quietly leaned down and swung her to her feet as though she had been a child. His action was so deliberate that she was conscious at first of sheer astonishment and of nothing else. Then she found herself in his arms, held in a vise, his flushed hot face against her own.

"You lovely lovely thing! God, how I've sweated and waited. Child, don't struggle so. There is no one to see—or hear! We have the place to ourselves. There_there_there!"

His queer gentleness contrasted strangely with Sally's wild rage. Afterward she realized that there was a moment when, if she had had a weapon, she would gladly have used it. Yet for very scorn of seeming a coward she forebore to weep or scream. And Wade was talking quietly in that low-pitched pleasant voice:

"Sally, there's nothing to be afraid of! I simply happen to be in love with you . . . And I'm no fool, you care too. I've seen you flush under my eyes . . . seen the tremors, the shy whims and moods that mean one thing in a woman—that she loves."

Sally was not frightened: sheer fury to be so hopelessly misunderstood throttled the words on her lips, but at last she could speak:

"You're crazy, Mr. Wade! Stark staring mad! I am in love—with the man I am engaged to, a man in New York. And you—why you're married!"

Wade's eyes burned, yet he laughed, still holding her hands.

"My misfortune, Sally! If I were not married this little scene might have been more conventional. I could have satisfied you with 'the ring and the book.' But as things are—ah, Sally, you were meant for me!''

He had loosened her hands, and she sprang to the door, to find it locked, the key gone. She stood at bay for an instant, but Wade did not move toward her. He sat down, and when he spoke it was in that cool voice which contrasted oddly with his flashing eyes and flushed cheeks:

"You've done the proper thing now—satisfied your conscience that you're trapped, blameless! So why not come to me of your own accord? After all, Sally Dallam, why are we made like this—why do we feel as we do, both of us?"

Standing against the door Sally was conscious of an incredible realization that even at this moment the man had charm, a certain vigorous beauty. He went on:

"Sit down, Sally. Talk it out. I promise not to touch you until you say I may. No, I'm not drunk! I merely began wrong—should have argued my case instead of playing this rough Sabine game. For you're no sentimental nymph, rather you're Diana herself . . . And I love you—your bloom and vitality your mind, your ambition. You've made me a little mad, as I've never been before. But if you give me your beauty I swear I'll be faithful, careful—I'll respect it—and you!"

"Respect . . ." Sally broke forth in raging amazement, "you don't know the meaning of the word!"

He moved; then as she started up, settled in his office chair.

"You're wrong there—Sally! I know you for the 'flower no man has worn'! But you say you're engaged, and I'm married. I tell you this moment you are feeling what you won't confess—rage, horror,—and curiosity! What would it be like, to yield ?—To know the passion even good women are curious about, to feel mastered, to taste that biting draft, the wine of Life..."

The swift words ceased abruptly, for an instant Sally's eyes were held by his. She felt the grip of a hypnotic will. Then slowly Wade came toward her. And Sally, as slowly and deliberately, walked to the nearest window. It was open, eight stories from the street, she knew that it looked down upon a wide empty court. At last her hand was on the sill, and she was facing Wade. He moved back, laughed a little:

"You wouldn't do that, Sally. You're too sane. And besides you have my word—to wait until you come to me."

"Then," said Sally in a quiet voice, "open the door, get your wife to divorce you, and come to me when you have something to offer besides insults."

"Sally, if you mean that I'll let you go-presently . . ."

She met his burning eyes, was conscious of fear, and spoke her thought aloud:

"Is he . . . oh, I wonder. . . ."

He came swiftly toward her as she leaned against the window-sill. For the second time in her life Sally Dallam felt the ice of terror close around her heart. And then Wade laughed again, held her for a long moment in a fierce possessive grip, then loosed her, took a key from his pocket.

"Go, then! And if I'm mad it's the oldest madness in the world." He continued in a different voice, wearily, almost listlessly: "And you're not only safe, unhurt, but you have my life in your hand. Tell your story, and I'm ruined—no position, no future—with a' wife and children to support. I'm quite all yours— Diana!"

His tone was half mocking, wholly callous, yet convincing. Sally hesitated, turned the key about in her hands. Now that she knew she had nothing further to fear she was conscious of a curious pity. And of one dreadful doubt. She said slowly:

"I can't promise never to speak of this, but I shan't tell any one who knows you, any one who will try to injure you. After all it seems to have been my fault too—"

The man, staring at her with eyes suddenly dulled and altered, said: "No, Sally. I've blundered, made an infernal fool of myself. You cared for some one, I was sure of that, why not for me? After all a man believes what he wishes,—about a woman's feeling."

"But what did I do?" said poor Sally. "If I have brought this on myself I want to know how!"

He lifted his heavy brows, slumped lower in his chair. "You were tingling with vitality, thinking about your lover, I suppose; and I interpreted your looks to suit myself. It's incredible that you should care for another man. Is it true! Or was it bluff, to save your face!"

"It's the truth, Mr. Wade." She spoke sharply, stood with her head lifted proudly, yet conscious even then of an impossible pity for him. And as she waited, wondering what she might say to salve her own pride and his incredible egoism, he suddenly put his head down upon his desk like some sick boy, and she saw his shoulders shaking. Then he was upright, looking straight into her eyes.

"Listen, Sally. I am forty-one, married for fifteen years to a woman made of granite—who considers passion ignoble, disgusting—who doesn't know what love is! We have two children—we observe the outer conventions—and are nothing to each other. Perhaps you'd deny me sympathy—I am flesh and blood, not stone, and all demure fresh-cheeked women are not like you, Sally Dallam. Yet somehow they've never held me, for I've craved not just the sudden flare but the steady flame. And now—Sally, Sally, an hour ago I merely wanted you. Now I'm punished, for I love you! No other man will ever care for you so much."

His voice shook and Sally was conscious of that horrible embarrassment which comes when, through no volition of our own, we are confronted by a naked soul. He moistened his dry lips, went on:

"After all what is a boy's calf-love compared to love a man gives, a man who has tasted the bittersweet of a mistaken marriage, waded through the Hell of ennui that bleak boredom as bitter as gall— a man whom your touch might quicken, magically renew! Sally, this feeling you've aroused is no passing whim but the thing that lasts! Together we could conquer this town, conquer our world!" She fitted the key into the door, said quietly: "Goodby, Mr. Wade."

He came toward her swiftly, and she waited on the threshold.

"Shake hands, Sally, tell me that you'll come back and help me finish the work we've begun?"

"How can I, Mr. Wade? You would think me-like those other women."

"No. Even I don't make the same blunder twice. Won't you go on with this work, give me your friendship? I tell you my life is empty, unbearable. Knowing you is like a spring in the desert. Forgive me, Sally and trust me."

She put out her hand. "I do; I will. But I cannot come back."

Yet his face at that moment, handsome, pleading, with dominating brow and passionate lips, stayed for days in her memory. She closed the door, went quietly down the empty corridors, and the emotion which held her was neither anger nor fear nor gratitude for her escape, but an intense pity. And something else that night as she lay awake she was conscious of a fierce distrust of herself, a contempt which seared her soul like flame. Passionately desiring to face Truth, however bitter, she recalled those words of Wade's: "I tell you this moment you are feeling what you won't confess . . . rage . . . horror, but also . . . curiosity! What would it be like, to yield? To know the passion even good women are curious about."

The words had burnt themselves into her subconscious mind, they came back as she lay alone in the darkness, and Sally told herself that what he had declared so rashly and insolently was true. For despite the rage which had shaken her, the man's personality had some strange hold upon her imagination, some inexplicable charm. The traitor within herself had desired to yield; even now she was conscious of the thing he had described as curiosity, the imp that whispered: "If I had been different, if I were not what they call 'good,' what would it have been like, the adventure of loving and being loved by such a man?" In her own safe, peaceful room, Sally faced the fact that in some half physical, half mental way Wade possessed for her an attraction as vital as any feeling she had experienced, yes, even for Donald. Not that exquisite faith, that selfless and shining love she had given Don, which she still felt for him and him alone, but an intangible, flashing, emotion which had its subtle lure. This consciousness amazed and enraged her. Engaged to a man, young, clean hearted, gay, a wholly satisfying lover, she was in his absence undergoing this ugly test called temptation, she, Sally Dallam, her mother's daughter!

She got up at last, struck a match, lighted the gas. In her long white gown, with her loosened hair, her flushed face, her eyes bright with pain and with something that was almost shame, she sought for the letter which had come only that morning, the daily letter from Donald. One page caught her attention; she read it again and again:

"It's a strange thing, Sally, but love like this sharpens a man's senses, quickens his instincts, deepens his realization of all the values of life. There's a boy in our office who talked to me as men rarely talk the other night. He is in trouble, a love affair, of course. His story I cannot repeat, but when he had told it all he added: 'I've made a clean breast to you, Graham, because I know you'll understand. You'll never love any but a good woman, yet you'll see how the other kind can tear a fellow's life to bits, even when he knows.'—I did understand, too.

For I am beginning to see that no man can be sure of himself without an anchor to windward. And oh, Sally, I'm glad you're your blessed self, that you're altogether human, clean not like snow, which can be sullied and blackened, but like wind and sea. You told me once of a little-girl experience of yours, the time you wanted to talk to a boy in a garden. You didn't go—God knows I am thankful. Those childish decisions often make or mar a life. But I am glad you wanted to go... otherwise I should be a little afraid to marry you."

In yesterday's letter Donald had mentioned seeing Helena at Marion's, where he had just spent a weekend. Sally hardly linked together that fact and the foregoing paragraph, but she was conscious of a strange relief from the tension of the evening. If Don were here she could tell him the whole story, not so much the adventure as it affected Wade—lawless, even brutal, yet not ignoble—but of her own reactions, the fact that she had known this vivid, absorbing experience, far more dangerous than any mere school-girl longing to meet a boy in a moonlit garden.

She crept back into bed, very softly so as not to disturb her mother in the next room, tucked Don's letter under her pillow and forgave herself, with a half humorous appreciation of her own absurd intensity.

CHAPTER XII

AN EXIT AND AN ENTRANCE

DURING the next few months Sally was conscious for the first time in her vigorous youth of a steady depression and a bodily fatigue which amazed and disquieted her. As it happened Donald was working harder than he had done at any time since his return from Italy, working, he wrote Sally, upon a competition which would count greatly not only to the two men actually busy upon the plans but to the office at large. He was also teaching at a down-town night school, and this not only paid well, but he enjoyed it as an opportunity to develop real talent and ambition in youths with no money for Columbia, Stevens or "Tech."

These activities, however, left him small leisure, and though his letters came every day, they were often mere notes, sometimes obviously written by a weary and overworked man. And the realization that even wellpoised Donald was capable of fatigue and possibly of depression aroused in Sally a flashing fear that life might cheat them yet of all that they desired most.

If they could only marry now and work together: if they could at least live in the same city, see each other frequently instead of once in several months. Sally told herself that she had much, that they were both young and strong, with all experience and adventure ahead, that she was fortunate, that she should be feeling in every fiber her happiness.

Yet analyzing one's reasons for being happy never yet made one so. And despite her friends in Washington, despite a few feeble attempts to write on Sundays and on those evenings when she had no callers, Sally awoke to the fact that life was suddenly gray, dull, disheartening. Actually she was suffering from the effects of a normal emotion, awakened, matured, yet with no outlet in sight. And perhaps that little adventure in Wade's office had precipitated the crisis; without this experience she might have gone on dreaming of love, writing to her lover, happy in receiving his letters. She told herself that these letters and their hopes for the future should be enough; yet more than once in the night she woke from vivid dreams to find that she was lonelier than she had believed possible in a world full of understanding friends. For once her mother was not enough. The wearing and uninteresting work at the office was not enough. The friendship of Anne, of other men and girls in Washington was not enough.

She tried to write verse or short stories in the evenings, only to find herself handicapped not merely by a dearth of time but also by a queer distaste for the effort of writing. What she ached for now was not selfexpression in forms of art, but simply and completely to live.

It was Anne who put the situation into words. One evening the two girls were in Anne's room, Sally was spending the night; they had been to the theater with John and the Doctor, and the play was one which a year ago neither girl would have liked or understood, Camille, with Bernhardt in the leading rôle. To-night in Anne's pretty room with its open fire, the girls braided their hair and exchanged confidences in immortal girl-fashion. Anne said thoughtfully:

"Sally, when I saw Bernhardt first she didn't seem real, I thought she over-acted, that the thing she played was not life but melodrama. But to-night . . ."

Sally took out her hairpins, the heavy mass of her hair gleaming in the firelight, but beneath its luxuriance her face was pale, there were purple shadows under her eyes.

"To-night she played on every little nerve until your body and soul ached,—filled your mind with a thousand questions...oh, I know!"

The sharp strange pain in the young voice caught Anne with her brush poised. The brush fell on the rug, and Anne threw her friend a look, probing, discerning.

"Every woman knows, Sally-when she's really a woman and still alone! At school you wanted to stay fifteen, and I longed to be really 'grown up, free.' But you were wiser than I, though I thought myself so sophisticated. Yet you ought to be happy-when you have Don!"

"That's my trouble, I haven't got Don: we're three hundred miles apart, tied down to our seperate routines-Heaven knows when we can be married. This separation wears on me, wears on him! There are times when I wish I didn't love him, that we weren't engaged, that I might have loved a man who could have married me at once, before youth and gladness andyes, passion !--- are dulled."

Her voice broke and suddenly Sally the optimist was sobbing, her head bent, her body shaking.

"Darling, it hasn't been a year yet! And you know Don cares . . . oh Sally, you've got that wonderful thing, all his love."

Sally wiped her eyes fiercely, scorning the folly of tears.

"It ought to be enough, but it isn't! Tonight when I watched Bernhardt I discovered something, that now I want the things women have, not the lighter happiness of And-well, the dreadful part is that something girls. outside myself and Don has taught me this."

"You mean-another man?"

"Compared to Don there is no other man! And yet-Anne, when you're not married they won't leave you alone. Geraldine told me that once, but I didn't understand. You don't love them, yet their emotion tires you, wears on you, even at queer moments attracts you. Do you know what I mean?"

"Yes. Sally. It makes one tolerant, doesn't it?" "Of what?"

"Of people who blunder-of the girl who finally marries the man who keeps on asking her because she can't marry the man she loves. The possible second-best seems better than nothing!"

Sally caught Anne by the shoulders. "You won't do that? Oh, Anne, promise me you won't!"

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Anne let herself be pulled down upon Sally's knee and held in warm arms, but she said wearily:

"No danger, Sally. I can't, being I. But sometimes I want to horribly, when John shows me the way he feets, and says things about living life fully—hints that he and I would have had—"

"What, dear?"

"Oh, healthy, happy children! And I suppose we would. Father seems to think that, when it comes to heredity, good health and good morals count more than passionate love without those things. I suppose some women can compromise, take what the gods offer, do without the realization of their silly day-dreams. But I can't, Sally. And I am horribly afraid I shan't change."

Sally's sympathy was intensified by that flame of romance which flickered brightly about everyone whom she loved. Anne's individuality, her delicate, finished loveliness of body charmed her as they had always done, and again she felt a rage against that blind dull youth— Jim or Geoffrey, she did not know which—whom Anne loved. Sally tried not to discover that which Anne had not wholly revealed, but if it was Jim she considered him blind and stupid, and if it was Geoffrey she yearned to turn his regard from herself to her friend.

To-night both girls fought shy of definite personalities. It was easier to talk of Bernhardt, of this need and desire common to most women, their new consciousness that marriage is the normal happy experience. The fact that they were developing along parallel lines was comforting, a fact which Sally tried to phrase.

"Take Marion: she might not understand us, Anne. I think she would hate Bernhardt, flout the notion that passion and romance really count much, in love and marriage. There are other women like her, married, but almost unconscious of that part of love which is not tenderness and duty, shared parenthood, but something fiery, elemental! And sometimes those women lose their husbands—or at least their real caring."

Sally of course was thinking of that confession of

Wade's and it happened that Anne had an acquaintance whose experience dovetailed with their conversation. Neither girl betrayed her friend, and the assurance that they could talk freely to each other without danger either of cross-questioning or betrayal gave both that sense of security often supposed to belong exclusively to friendships between men.

Sally was also careful never to show any suggestion of pity for this altered Anne. That such a tangle should have enmeshed Anne—proud, mistress of a delicate irony that always fascinated Sally, prosperous, courted, beloved—this seemed utterly incongruous. But then life was incongruous, and the touch of nobility ingrained in the character of a woman who loves with dignity and yet without return, seemed to Sally finer than the something in herself that had secured Donald's devotion. She feared she might have been too egoistic, too meanly proud to have loved a Donald who gave her anything short of his utmost.

Yet even as her mind dwelt upon this, Anne said in the clairvoyant fashion both showed now and then when together:

"Sally, don't suppose for an instant that I believe in 'unrequited love." It's a contradiction of terms, I've always known that. Love means give and take; when it doesn't the lover must conquer his feeling, or hers and in time I believe it's possible—always. But I suppose recovery comes more speedily when the other person marries. And I almost wish—"

Sally had forgotten her own depression and her eyes burned.

"Anne, it makes me furious—that any man can be such a fool! Oh, I have no respect for him—he is so unspeakably *stupid*!"

Anne blushed, then said slowly:

"I'm glad you feel that way, Sara Dallam, glad you would love me, if you were a man!"

"Oh, wouldn't I," cried Sally. "But Heavens, how many others!"

"And they don't matter a picayune, Sally, never will!"

Sally stroked the dark hair. "Whatever happens we have each other, Annette ... and the more I care for Don the more I know how much all love counts!"

Anne's little thin face was flushed, happier than it had been an hour ago.

"Sally you mean more to me than almost any one. I don't know what I shall do when you're married. I want you to have everything, happiness, New York, Don. But oh, this town is going to be a desert—without you!"

"Why Anne! I never dreamed-"

Anne got up, flung sentiment into the fire with a bent hairpin:

"Ŝally Dallam, it is two o'clock, and we are a pair of fools. You've got to work to-morrow, and I to practice for the Curran's musicale. We'll look like frumps and feel like boys who have been on an all night spree!"

"All right," said Sally. "Only I'm glad we're not wise and discrete. I hate discretion! And I'd put up with parboiled eyes for a month rather than miss that last speech of yours!"

"Sentimentalist!" scoffed Anne. But they went to bed in a little glow of exaltation and went promptly to sleep, whereas two hours earlier they had desired all the gifts which the gods had withheld and none which they had given.

It was a few days later that Sally had another adventure which swept her back into that dreaded mood of depression and discontent.

Dulled and spent after a full day at the office, she went for a walk, this time without her wheel or Anne, hoping that solitude and a glimpse of the peaceful river would dispel her weariness. She walked around the monument, through the White Lot, standing for a moment under a budding young oak to stare dreamily at the Potomac, yellow rather than blue, flashing in the sunlight. Startled by a hand on her arm, she turned and faced Wade, a gray-faced, gaunt-looking Wade whom she hardly recognized.

"Will you shake hands with me, Sally? I saw you on the Avenue, followed you here—You never answered my letters." Sally let him clasp her hand, conscious of a rush of pity followed by that indefinable mixture of sensations which this man aroused in her. They walked along by the water, and he said quietly:

"I've had a bad time since I saw you. My son was just fifteen—the center of all our hopes—he died last month. Be a little sorry for me, dear!"

Sally was sorry, and her moved face and lovely friendly eyes said so.

He told her the story; the boy had caught cold, developed pneumonia, was dead in a week. The little daughter had also been ill, but had recovered and was now at Atlantic City with Mrs. Wade.

"The book," said Sally, "---is it finished ?"

Wade shook his head. "I doubt if it ever is, without you. Since that night I have put it aside, and the office work has been piling up for weeks."

She said nothing and they walked on, speaking very little. At last Wade took her arm, held it in his firm grip.

"Sally, I've wanted you so—ever since the boy went. I knew you would care, knew no face would ever seem so lovely to me as yours, no hand so comforting . . . Ah, Sally, it's the real thing . . . you needn't fear me again. I would take nothing that you did not freely give. But I can't help believing that deep in you there's some response, that sometimes you . . . want what I want! Isn't it true? Tell me, Sally Dallam?"

His hand gripped her arm, and she stood facing him, the shadows of late afternoon softening the high colors and delicate contours of youth and lending her a look of mellowed maturity. She was thinner than when he had last seen her, her cheeks were not so pink and her eyes were larger, darker, more luminous. Wade's arm fell, he did not touch her, but his eyes devoured her and he said again:

"Tell me, Sally-the truth!"

Sally looked straight back at him; he saw that her hands trembled but that her eyes were as steady as fixed stars.

"In a way, it is," she said quietly.

Color rushed into his face: he looked young again, extraordinarily handsome.

"You honest child! Oh, I knew that I didn't imagine—everything!"

Sally gave a little sigh, walked on slowly. He went beside her, his hand on her arm, his extraordinary vitality arousing in her that indescribable, almost overmastering emotion which was not love—she was sure it was not love—but whatever it was it quickened her pulses, sharpened her consciousness of beauty and pain.

"Mr. Wade, it is true, but not the whole truth! What you said that night, one thing particularly, has stayed in my mind. And I have remembered you. At this moment—well, if there were no other man, if it weren't for my mother—perhaps I should be weak crazy!"

"Your mother!" Wade laughed, short harsh laughter. "Sally, I could make you forget your mother, this man you talk about, every soul you know! I could make you feel as many women are incapable of feeling, because you are alive, and now you're awake, really awake! I see it in every line. And I can make your pulses throb, your youth sing. Sally, darling, give me a chance, wait until I can manage things—open a path. And oh, I want those kisses I've dreamed about, which you didn't give me, but which you could give ... this moment"

She was trembling yet she passively allowed Wade to lead her to a seat facing the water. He sat close, his clenched hand lying on her knee. No one was in sight. Yet despite her mounting excitement Sally had no sense of fear. She was conscious that this was her chance to conquer not the man but the something in herself which she recognized and defied. She thought of Don, but with no sense of disloyalty now. It was for him, for herself, that she was fighting.

"Listen, Mr. Wade." She sat with clasped hands her eyes fixed on the muddy river which yet borrowed beauty from the dreamy opalescent sky. "I am going to tell you the truth—because only truth helps—lies defeat their own object! You"re right, there is some response in me to—to this feeling of yours . . . Only— I hate it! There's nothing on earth I should despise so as myself—if I yielded . . .''

"Puritanism, Sally, refusal to recognize those forces strongest in strong people."

"No. it is not. Even if I were free, if you were unmarried. I should still fight it as one fights things ugly, unclean! You say you love me-but what you love is not the best I have, not my real self, the thing they call personality, but just my body-just the response to your magnetism, the yielding to your selfishness! Oh, I've thought it out: the reason you sway me in this strange way-you do, I acknowledge it-is because you have had practise in attracting women, because you have not been-good! I'm a girl. crude. inexperienced, while you have made it your business to awaken women, many women! You had beauty and intellect to start with, now you have experience too. So your personality leaves its mark! You have made me conscious of myself-made me suffer horribly, afraid of my own impulses."

He leaned toward her, took both her hands. "I knew I couldn't be mistaken! You untamed, lovely thing, I wanted you to suffer—so you'd understand, turn to me!"

"Oh," cried Sally. "You 'wanted me to suffer'.... But is that *love*! And because I see you as you are, I love the man I am going to marry a thousand times more!"

"Sally—you can't marry him! You belong to mewere meant for me—Together we'll go far—far, I tell you!"

"No! I wouldn't marry you if there were nobody else, if we were both free! Love means giving—what you want is to take! There may be men still able to care for one woman after living selfishly, cheaply . . . but not you. And seeing what self indulgence does to a man makes me realize my happiness! To-day I care more for the boy I'm going to marry than I ever did. I know he's giving me his best, that he's kept himself elean, fought through scenes like this, perhaps, and von!"

She ceased; Wade got slowly to his feet.

"By God, you're wrong! My capacity to love isn't lead—even if I've lost you—the one woman I've really ared for and respected, in twenty years! Sally, if rou'd been older, or I younger, we should have been happy, happier than any other man will make you. And even yet..."

She lifted her head, her eyes shone. "You're wrong, wrong! Seeing you to-day has set me free from the naunting thought of you—of those things you said. And now, good-by."

He stared at her, his face haggard as she took his inert and. She said in a tone suddenly kind:

"Mr. Wade, I'm sorry if I've hurt you . . . please, please be true to yourself, keep your ambition, hold on to your little girl, your wife. After all it's a hard battle for us all. Don't let them beat you!"

She was gone, and he stood and looked after her flying figure, an incredulous look, blend of cynicism, passion, a new tenderness. But Sally rushed joyously homeward through the purple dusk. She knew that the vivid ghost haunting her for weeks was laid: if she had not seen Wade again she might have been conscious always of contradictory feelings for him, a pang of unwilling interest, of secret curiosity, of obsessing emotion.

At her own door she stood still and stared at the man who came to meet her. And the first words he spoke began a new era in Sally Dallam's life.

BOOK III

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THE MIRACLE OF HAPPINESS

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ONE APRIL NIGHT

SALLY in her own doorway, flushed, eager, hardly daring to believe her own eyes, found herself face to face with Donald. the Donald of the Adirondack woods rather than the busy architect whose work had been wearing off the keen edge of gleaming first youth. For a moment this man was a boy again.

"Sally, we've won the competition! It means promotion, the first stride towards success. It means—oh, my darling, it means marriage, soon, now!"

There was a little space of silence, silence that burnt bright with the gold of a passion without alloy. They tasted again that sharp sweetness which is like nothing else, the joy known in its fullness to those who have saved themselves whole for love. Sally was even conscious that the moment would have been less perfect without that fresh accent of pain, that subtle puzzling experience with Wade.

Donald said presently, in a low moved voice:

"Sally, you're always so much more wonderful than I remember. If this means so much what will marriage be?"

His question brought the deep color to her cheeks, her eyelids drooped.

"To have you mine, all mine-oh, Sally!"

"Yet there's so much to ask and tell and explain," she said at last as they sat side by side upon the old fashioned sofa. "Why is everything suddenly changed, why do you feel that we needn't wait any longer?"

"I was afraid to tell you of all the possibilities, dear. If I had failed at least only I would have suffered the reaction and disappointment. But we didn't fail! You know Blaide and I were on the thing together. The office tore to pieces every plan we drew at first, then we saw light. Our minds began to coordinate, the fellows who saw our sketches stopped their destructive criticism: one of the members of the firm, Waite, took me aside and told me that I had a big idea. that if I worked it out well he believed we had the stuff for suc-That was two months back-we finished the job cess. three weeks ago and the decision reached us Thursday afternoon after the Jury had worked through something like thirty plans, narrowed down to three, and finally picked MacDonald, Mann and Waite as winners. This morning at ten o'clock I saw MacDonald in his office and he told me that my salary would be thirty-five hundred with another increase in the Fall. So I took the noon train, to you! And day before yesterday came this. from Dad."

He handed Sally a letter and she read:

"My dear Son,

"After prolonged ignorance as to your affairs I hear through your Mother that you and Sally Dallam are engaged. In Heaven's name why didn't you or Sally tell me? I would never have helped the child get into that treadmill if I had known that she was to marry my son!

that she was to marry my son! "However, now that I do know the situation I expect to have some attention paid to my wishes and prejudices. Long engagements are unnatural, unwholesome. I want you to marry now, while you are both at your best as to health and power for enjoyment. When Marion married I agreed to give her an allowance of fifteen hundred a year for five years, and now I offer you the same, with the understanding that you are making at least two thousand more, and that you and Sally marry at once. "It was a grief to me that neither you nor Jim studied law,

"It was a grief to me that neither you nor Jim studied law, but I have reason to believe you both have shown wisdom in your choice of a profession, and I am proud of my sons. I may as well add that if one of you had not married Sally Dallam I should have been a badly disappointed man. She is a rare woman and she will make you a rare wife. The fact that she has talent, character and charm do not injure your chances for success and happiness. Wishing you both all prosperity, my dear son, I remain

"Your affectionate

"FATHER."

Sally read the letter, smiled over it, and handed it back.

"He's a darling,—but ought we to accept his offer?" "Perhaps not, yet if he can afford it things will go easier all around. Of course your Mother is to live with us, Sally."

"She won't," said Sally. "No matter how we both beg... Her independence is like the color of her eyes. You can't change it. And Washington has come to mean home to her. I don't know what Anne or the Doctor would do without her. Or Geoffrey Kent. He used to be rather fond of me. but Mother has cut me out. And Don, he's writing good stuff that makes me envious. He's going to make a reputation!"

Don nodded, his eyes on Sally's eager face. "So are you, Sallykins! When we're married—in a place of our own, somewhere in down-town New York— Geoff says you have ability, and he knows. I want you to go on with your own work, want it to count as mine does."

"You never said this before!"

"But I always meant it! Marriage needn't be tame, the end of a woman's freedom, unless the people who marry are tame, damned by precedents. I want things for you, Sally. And I believe you can trust me."

"Trust you!" Sally laughed, touched his strong, jutting chin, the firm curves of his lips, took off his eye-glasses and laid cool fingers on his eyes. "Don," she said it solemnly, "I trust you as Mother trusts her own particular God."

They sat around the little wood fire on a Sunday night in a late chill April, Sally's small special group, and the girl was conscious of vivid pleasure, not merely in Donald, her own personal happiness, but in this handful of friends who made her joys their own. Geoffrey, Jim, the Doctor, the "Starved Sparrow" with a girl friend of his, Anne's John Hawley and of course Anne, they were all there.

Anne was gayest of them all, in a little red frock with a red rose in her hair, whistling the wedding march as Don and Sally came into the room together, chuckling over her chat in the kitchen with the exultant Aunt Matilda. That ebon personage had confidentially remarked: "Laws, Miss Anne, I sure has prayed and wrastled at the throne of grace for Miss Sally. I was plumb scared that she'd git to be an old maid 'fore Mr. Don could build enough stables and car barns to pay for their upkeep in that thar sinful cole-hearted Yankee land. But Mr. Don's got some gumption, and I reckon Miss Sally she won't do no mo' o' that typewritin' for Uncle Sam."

Anne regaled the others with a picture of Matilda's satisfaction, mingled with her ill-concealed pity for Anne. "She told me, 'nev' min', Miss Anne. Mr. Right will be a-comin' along yit, an' givin' you one of them new autobubbles and a sure 'nuff sealskin coat draggin' on the groun'. An' then you kin jus' hand it out to Miss Sally, and tell her that them as waits wins!""

John Hawley, big, quiet, with his splendid shoulders, excellent tailoring and look of flawless health, growled under his breath to Jim:

"I hope to the Lord Matilda's right! If 'them as waits wins' I may play a star part yet."

Jim, looking at the rose in Anne's hair and idly wondering why she had not married this clean, wholesome man years ago, remarked in exactly the right tone, neither too sympathetic nor too casual. "She's worth waiting for—Anne. I never saw her prettier than she is to-night, young as April, fresh as a spray of mignonette."

John looked at Dr. Jim a little curiously. The young surgeon was very thin and already his face was lined; yet John thought it might be pleasant to be as heartwhole as Jim appeared. Certainly this waiting game had its limitations. One grew lonely, discouraged, one even felt old when one looked at Sally and Donald and remembered how long it had been since one's first proposal to Anne.

Yet discussing Anne even with Jim was impossible, so John asked:

"How did that major operation turn out, Jim? The brakeman with seven children and a bum appendix. You won't get rich on that sort of practise, but I suppose it's fine experience."

"Corking! We pulled him through; he's back on his job, husky as you are. His wife sent me this last week," and Jim, with a boyish grin and something like a blush, handed Hawley a watch charm in the shape of a tiny silver horseshoe.

Hawley examined it with interest. The practical trend of his own mind did not lessen his appreciation of the sort of success which may not be measured by dollars and cents.

"I hope he is also good for a decent fee," he said; but Jim touched the little charm affectionately as he fastened it in place, and shrugged his shoulders.

"You can't send a bill for two hundred dollars to a man who has seven children and an income of twelve hundred a year. It wouldn't be decent. But there are others who do pay. Don't worry about me. I shan't starve, John."

"But some day you'll want to marry," said the man who desired to marry Anne. "And you'll need every fee you can collect."

Jim made a gesture of careless negation. "Perhaps. But I doubt it. Doctors' wives have a hard time and even old bachelors have their uses."

It happened that Sally heard this little colloquy, and she glanced at Anne, standing with one foot on the fender talking to Geoffrey. Anne's cheeks suddenly became fire bright: she had heard too, and at last Sally knew that it was not Geoffrey whom Anne loved. The happy girl looked at her prospective brother-in-law with eyes suddenly wistful.

"If one could just show him," she said under her breath. "The old blind bat! Not to see how wonderful she is—what a wife she could be! To have Anne for a sister—oh, Jim, stupid Jim!"

Her mother called her into the dining room; presently Don followed, and after a little three-sided talk about supper Honor left them together. Don closed the door after her and stood staring at Sally in her blue dress, much the tone of that lovely linen she had worn in camp. But the laughter died out of her eyes as he murmured:

"Think of it, dear! In less than fifteen hours we'll be away from them all, alone together!"

For an instant it was as it had been that hour on the lake. They were trembling, the world existed only for them, and Don said at last:

"Father's right, about long engagements being 'unnatural'. Only he should have said 'any engagement'."

Some one was calling Sally, and Don stood alone in the little dining room staring at a lilac bush in the side yard. He looked very young, despite his glasses and new lines of responsibility, and he asked himself what they mattered, all the hateful details of a wedding, the inevitable fuss and flurry, when in the end she became his, this tall gray-eyed Sally with cheeks crimson and pale, by turns, with hands that gripped and lips that clung and laughter that broke in the middle...

Out in the garden Anne, a scarf flung about her shoulders, was gathering lilacs under a pale shimmer of moonlight, and for a moment it was Jim and not John who stood beside her smiling down at her moon-white forehead gleaming through the midnight of her hair.

The young Doctor was saying:

"Anne, I never saw you look like this! And the wedding flummery has demoralized me. I want—what the wise man simply takes! After all, I've known you almost as long as I've known Sally—something like a dozen years."

Anne laughed softly.

"You wouldn't want me to kiss all the men I'd known twelve years, Jim?"

"Perhaps not, but—well, talk's futile, Anne!" And for just a moment he held her, kissed her on the lips.

"Sometimes I'm sorry for John," he said, "but on the whole I'm selfishly glad he hasn't won out. John's the kind who might disapprove of old friends kissing his wife."

Anne, in the fragrant dusky garden, gave another low laugh. And suddenly she caught Jim's coat lapels and kissed him deliberately, and this time her lips were not

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lelicate flower petals but sweet hot fire. . . . In that ne kiss she put the unspoken eloquence of years, and hen she was gone, swift as light, and presently on the orch might have been seen pinning a spray of white ilac on John's coat.

Jim stood where she left him, red with sheer amazenent. He said to himself at last:

"Jim Graham, you are an infernal *fool!* That's the weetest girl you know, and you'll be putting notions in er head if you don't look out."

Then he sighed, touched his lips with an astonished nger and chuckled at his own abysmal conceit. "She's n love with love; women always are when there's a ride about. The very fact that she kissed me proves hat there's nothing to it!"

He smoked a cigarette before going back into the ouse, his face settling into deep grave lines, as he hought of a woman who was his patient and the wife f a friend. He had liked the man and loved the voman for several years. He believed that no mortal new his weakness, and least of all the woman herself. f he had not been obsessed by this secret unattainable deal, Anne's kiss might have taught him many things. As the case stood he told himself impatiently that there aust be no playing with fire. As man and physician the knew that mere philandering means nothing but be used by long regret.

The relations between his mother and father inluenced Jim as well as Donald, for the unswerving evotion of any married pair inevitably affects other ives. It counts as a true ear counts in music. When ou once know the musical scale singing off-key hurts ou. Jim had no special theories about love and mariage, he was not a reformer or a moralist, he merely lated makeshifts, concessions, cheap substitutes. If ne could not marry the woman whose whole personality rew one as the magnet draws, spirit and body, then one lept away from other women, save only those whom ne could count as friends. And Anne was a friend vorth having, a friend to keep. If things had been lifferent she might have been a girl to love. Some day

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he would tell her of that unconfessed caring which was the one secret of his busy crowded life. For the rest his work was everything, and nobody cared more for that work than Anne.

It was later, when supper was over, that Sally quite without planning it, made an impulsive little speech, flung suddenly to the group about the fire. She was to be married in the morning, in church, to leave directly after the ceremony, and to-night her happiness was in her face, in her quick words.

One bit both Geoffrey and Anne recalled long afterward, a fragment which seemed torn from the very personality of Sally Dallam:

... "Of course getting married isn't the beginning of a girl's experience. She's been made by the people she's known, who have believed in her, loved her. Without any one of you I couldn't be so happy to-night. I owe you a debt I've got to pay. It's not only Motherand Don-but what each one of you has been and given."

At this point she paused, looked about her with those shining eyes, and suddenly she was conscious of a dreadful sensation, a sort of stage fright. In another instant she was out of the room, up the stair.

The little group left behind looked after her, looked at each other, then broke up in a gay clatter of laughter and haste. Everybody was seeing everybody else home, and nobody mentioned Sally's name; it was a curious tribute they paid her. Yet not one of the group was ever to forget the sharp spring wind blowing through the little house, the flickering firelight, the garden perfumes, and that girlish voice, poignant, eager, touched with the magic of vivid youth. Each word she spoke had breathed a passionate faith in the quality and integrity of these friends she was leaving and yet in a sense holding within herself, as we all hold forever the essence of that faith and affection which have built our house of life.

CHAPTER II

THE WONDERFUL WEEK

TEN days later Sally Graham sat in a crevice below a cliff walk, looking down on a wide gray sea that dashed and crashed and leaped against vast armies of rock, retreating, encroaching, spray flying, air like the clean free breath of Almighty God. For the moment she was alone; Don had gone for the afternoon mail, and she lay back against a heavy gray overcoat, luxuriously comfortable and dreamily content.

During those bright days Sally had lived to the uttermost. It was easy now to recall Wade, the haunting effect of his personality, easy to go farther back and remember the little girl at church, looking up at the boy in the gallery . . . Reassured by this sense of fulfilment, this sharpening of all the values of life, she had a vast young pity for those who lacked this wealth which had come to her and Don. Beauty of spirit and body enthralled her. Don's face when they were alone, the strong rhythmical lines of his body, his joy in all that she possessed of beauty, youth, emotion—these things enchanted and exhausted her. So now she lay on the rough overcoat, the sun warming her deliciously. As she lay she dreamed, and after a little while day dreams passed into slumber.

"Sally, Sally, where are you?" She sat up, and Donald came scrambling down from the cliff, in a moment was beside her. "You baby, you've been asleep!"

"Yes," she said, "I could sleep a week. It's Heaven here. Don. But the letters, did we get any?"

"Never mind letters now." He was close to her, his touch suddenly sharp and passionate. as though expressing pain rather than joy. It was almost time to dress, so presently they went through a quaint pleasant inn up to a room where windows looked upon the cliff walk, the great age-old changeless rocks and the ocean glinting like wrinkled metal as far as the eye could reach. It was, even apart from the view, a pleasant room, sunny, smelling of the sea and of the pines which one could almost touch with an outstretched hand. The bed was covered with a quilt of many colors made long ago for a bride by friendly hands, and there were flowers in vases on mantel and dresser.

As they crossed the threshold Don closed the door behind them. He still had at times a feeling of hurry, a fear that soon they must separate. But there was plenty of time, there was always plenty of time now. No more trains to catch, no more of those absurdly long letters, no more waking up in the night with that ache of loneliness and sheer longing....

Suddenly Sally flung at him his own boyish philosophizing:

"Thank the Lord kissing isn't all of Life!"

"What blind cubs boys are!" he said, adding after a moment, shyly:

"Your shoulders, Sally, they're so strong and white . . . darling, I didn't dream God made women so wonderful."

The roar of the surf against the rocks sang to them like a lullaby, and their faces glowed in the red light of sunset. Their youth was like a golden apple caught and flung and caught again, the impact of their happiness was like sharp pain.

"After all," thought this Sally, still analyzing, trying to understand, beneath the surface of her incredible content, "after all I am glad I didn't try to write more. For I knew so little, and knew that I didn't know! Now Life seems translucent, elemental. Perhaps I can put it all into verse, or queer fairy tales for grown-ups; after all love is a fairy tale."

"What are you thinking about, Sally?"

"You—and writing—the folly of trying to do anything until one's lived."

He did not reply in words but in tense moments she sometimes seemed to feel the beat of his very thought.

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She was watching a cloud floating in the blue like a great snowy bird, yet still conscious of Don's firmly modeled profile, of his strong muscular arms, the white curves of his throat; and these rested her in some mysterious fashion. Suppose it had been any one but Don. She shivered.

"What is it, Sally?"

"Imagining horrors-belonging to anybody else! Don, has it been hard, I mean-waiting for this,-for me?"

"Sometimes. Not that my mind has ever wavered or questioned."

"How then, Don?"

He moved a little away, gazed at the white bird-cloud. "Oh, a man's a queer animal, Sally. Sometimes some woman's face, her way of walking, the red full curve of her lips, gives him a sudden definite desire. And when she is—I mean when he feels that he has only to ask —there's the devil to pay. You see?"

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"Yes, Donald. I do see."

"Sally, has there been some one? Do you understand because you've experienced the same sort of thing?" "Yes."

"For a man you've met recently?"

"Yes—but I seemed to know it for just what it was, a lonesome ache of the body, a sort of curiosity, which I think women must often feel, yet perhaps never confess, even to themselves!"

"My honest Sally! But is it all right now, no 'buts' or 'ifs'?"

She sighed, smiled at him.

"Yes, oh, yes! Never before was color so lovely light so dazzling—it's as though I'd been blind, was seeing for the first time."

"Yes . . . that's it."

Sally remembered that other people existed.

"Don, how do they go on, people who have had all this, and then lost it, through death, or some living tragedy!"

"Don't think about horrors, dear."

"That's so like a man! Pretending nothing sad

exists, because he's got what he wants!"

She added presently:

"I've always hated possessive people, and now-oh, I'm idiotic-but I couldn't bear you to look at another woman!"

"If I don't want to, if you mean all womanhood—for me!"

She sat up straight, put her hands on his shoulders.

"No, I don't want that! Really! I want you to know women, to have friends, interests. And I want them too. Life must be full to the brim, so we'll have something to bring each other every day, new ideas, new appreciations, a perpetually changing developing love!"

"But Sally, this is about my limit!"

"There is no limit; that's the miracle, Don-darling." She added after a long pause. "It's so wonderful to know when one's happy, when Life is absolutely right! Some people don't, until afterward."

"That," said Don, "is not our kind of folly!"

"But the letters Don, who are they from? Where are they?"

He pulled her to him, tracing with his finger the outline of her profile, strong brow, finely modeled nose, full firm lips, and the chin, a little too square and firm but humanized by the deep dimple which he loved.

"Sally, you're too good to be true!"

"Don, my letters!"

"There are none!"

"Not one, from Mother?"

"Not one, for you.—Sally, has this been the best time of all, to-day?"

"Yes, the very best! Why?"

"Because we've got to leave this blessed little room and the sound of the waves, and go back to the world of silly other people—with their silly troubles!"

"But why?"

"You wondered why Jerry and Marion didn't get to our wedding. Well, I know. They've had a quarrel, are separated, talking of divorce!"

"Why, Donald Graham, you've dreamed it—a nightmare." "It's true!"

"Oh, but why? They have been devoted, inseparable, and there are the children, Jim and Prim!"

"Exactly, there are the children, my only niece and nephew. You'd suppose they would count for ballast!"

"'Don, don't be so irritating. Tell me the trouble." "The trouble is—a woman. I hate to spoil our holiday, to worry you!" "Don't be absurd. You can't keep me in cotton wool! What woman?"

"Helena . . . now you know . . ."

CHAPTER III

AN INTERRUPTED HONEYMOON

S ALLY sprang to her feet, galvanized by sheer incredulity, and stared at her husband's face, for the moment strange to her, set and stern.

"But Helena and Jerry—why it's absurd, impossible. He disliked her, distrusted her."

"Yes, but Marion's had her around perpetually, thrown them together. I can see how it happened. Helena is . . . well, after all she's a woman and one is supposed to be a gentleman."

"Don, do you mean?"

"Nothing, and everything. You disliked her, Sally, why I didn't know, but of course you were right."

Sally hesitated. Then she said slowly: "I was frightfully jealous. You know her beauty is intoxicating, even to women. And you were with her a great deal."

"It wasn't only that; I've wondered whether you knew something about her. If you can throw any light on the case, do it, Sally, for Marion's sake. We have got to help, somehow."

Sally confessed what she had never told before. "I found that she was the 'Helen' of my childhood, whom Alfred Buchanan loved, and I hated, that she lied about that old affair, told nothing about breaking with him and marrying before his death, posed as a heartbroken woman. It made a romantic story; it was only by accident that I heard it all, pieced the bits together."

"And you never told Marion?"

"How could I, Don?-when I knew myself prejudiced, jealous."

He was silent, and Sally came back, sat down and leaned against him.

"Do you think I was wrong?"

"Yes. But so was I. Jim insists the one thing that does more harm than malicious gossip is reticence about ugly facts, professional etiquette. And the code of well bred people may be as dangerous as medical ethics! We were all wrong, even Jim kept his mouth shut. As I remember that time we were at the lake he distrusted her, probably with good reason. Between us we've made the present situation possible."

Sally gasped. "But we only tried to be decent! Don, after I left something happened. Was it Helena who—might it have been Helena, I mean."

"I suppose it 'might have been' if your hold hadn't been so strong, Sally. There was one evening when she looked like 'the blessed Damosel', and I made an ass of myself. It was a close call so I simply got out; I knew she had it in for me, but I never thought of this! Incidentally she's ruining the life of her best friend."

"Yet Jerry-surely Jerry is to blame too!"

"Of course—yet Marion should have seen! Don't talk to me about women's intuition after this. Just once when I saw her she was absolutely sincere—her natural self."

"Is your letter from Marion or Jim?"

"Marion. Here it is."

Sally found it a curious experience to be reading that letter on her honeymoon. The last page came like a dash of icy water against her hot cheeks.

"So of course you must see that there is but one thing for me to do, divorce Jerry. I found them in each other's arms; he did not speak one word, but she turned to me and said: 'Marion, you have never known what love is. That is why this has happened.' And she had the insolence to add: 'What are you going to do?'

"I got to the door and said at last: 'If he cares for you, take him!'

"She left the next morning and Jerry that night. I haven't seen either of them since. I can't sleep or eat, the world is still whirling, but I will not beg my own husband to return to me. If he loves that woman he can have her. Though she's own sister to Judas, that doesn't exonerate him. He has written me, but I tore up the letter. If you or Jim cannot come on at once I shall go to my lawyer within the next few days... The children are well. At least they are mine, thank God. But Jerry—Don, the thing is a horrible nightmare. I have been praying that I may wake up, but God does not answer the prayers of a fool!"

Sally laid down the sheet of paper covered with the rapid irregular writing. Marion usually wrote the most legible and dainty hand; this letter might have been written by some weary old woman. The letters were blurred, often formless, the lines slanted down the page, it was barely decipherable. Donald said in a low voice:

"Sally-to see you cry on our wedding trip!"

"We haven't time for crying," and Sally began to dress feverishly. "We must see Jerry at once. We'll have to show him exactly what Helena is, Don. It's the one chance."

"Exactly. And after Jerry, Marion."

The next night in New York they trailed Jerry from his office to a small downtown hotel, and finally knocked on his door. His voice answered, and they entered, but the man standing beside an open window they would hardly have known. He looked years older than the Jerry they remembered, homely yet attractive. Now his ruddy color was gone, his eyes were dull, the lines between his brows and at the lip corners were cut deep, even his one beauty, curling reddish hair which waved back from a fine brow, looked lusterless, almost unkempt. He stood staring at them as they came into the room; then with a cynical smile:

"Hail to the bride! This is an unexpected honor, Don."

Sally went straight across the room without looking at Donald and laying her hand on Jerry's shoulder she kissed him. "Jerry, dear!"

He had known her for ten years or more, had teased and kissed the school-girl Sally, and because he was married and older than Don or Jim her relation to him had been much that of a younger sister. Yet he moved back in astonishment now, and then laughed.

"Evidently you don't recognize the family black sheep, my girl, a bad egg, not a decent brother-in-law."

"We know a good deal," said Don, shaking his hand.

"But one side of a story is never satisfactory. We want details."

They sat down, Sally in a little chair by the desk, Donald in a stodgy hotel rocker, Jerry on the foot of his bed. And after a moment he began to talk, speaking awkwardly, as though words hurt:

"Marion's been nagging me to give up my law partnership with Ransom. That was the beginning. I threw over engineering and studied law because she wanted me to . . . But now this law business is my own: I've never liked it, but we're earning a living and Ransom's all right. Marion says he's common, but he's a clever business man, a good lawyer, so I won't give him up, and she's been angry for months. She's got some fool notion of cases being gained through social connections,—picked out a man she wanted me to go in with, one of the Van Winkles,—fellow I can't bear."

"But Helena. What has Helena to do with all this?" said Don.

Jerry shrugged his shoulders. "I'm telling this my way —best I can do."

"Go on, Jerry."

He obeyed not so much Sally's verbal command as the touch of her fingers.

"Helena's been staying at our apartment half the time. The place was full of her clothes and her music. She's been studying the violin, meeting a lot of musical people. One night Marion and I were wrangling—she dragged Helena into it, asked her if she didn't think I wasn't all wrong."

"Yes, Jerry. Go on."

"Helena sided with me, said I ought to do what I thought best. Afterward Marion was out late and Helena and I got to talking in the library. I hadn't liked her, but now she seemed different, friendly, peaceful—I was sick of bickering. Before she went to her room that night she . . . well, I kissed her. That began it. I don't mean there was anything wrong; she just rested me and I was grateful. Then the musical pals fell off, or she stopped their coming. One night Marion was ill, we had seats for Tannhauser. She insisted on my taking Helena, and we had supper together ---came home in a hansom . . .''

He paused and Don said in a peculiar voice:

"What happened then?"

Jerry flushed. "I don't like your tone! Decent women have cared about married men before now—and that's Helena's whole crime. We're in love with each other!"

"And the children," said Don quietly, "Jim and Prim, all your responsibilities?"

Jerry wiped his forehead with a handkerchief; it was dripping wet, although the window was open and the night was cool.

"That's the infernal mess—the children. Marion says I shall never see them . . ."

"Well, why should you, Jerry; throwing over your family for a woman like Helena?"

Jerry got to his feet, the brothers-in-law faced each other. "Drop that, Don! I won't stand for it. Shemy God, she loves me as Marion doesn't know how to love! And I'm done with being nagged, frozen, managed. I'm sorry for the publicity, but the smash had to come."

"Is your plan to marry Helena when Marion has divorced you?"

"Of course. I tell you she cares, and I've compromised her."

Donald laughed, but before Jerry could move Sally had put her arms around him.

"Jerry, that's your story. Now listen to ours" and she recounted the tale of Alfred Buchanan. "That Helen and your Helena are the same, Jerry. She broke with Alfred and married the other man, but afterward, when her lover was dead, she inherited the earnings from his invention and made up the story which she told you and Marion. I'm not judging her because she loves you, Jerry. I knew another girl who cared for a married man. I didn't stop respecting her, trusting her. But Helena's not straight—about anything."

Jerry moved away, sat down on the bed again, looked out of the window with weary bloodshot eyes. He spoke doggedly: "She doesn't always tell the truth. We've known that. But she's had trouble—had to deal with rotten people. And for a man to have such a woman in love with him ought to make up for anything!"

"You say she's in love with you?" Don spoke very quietly.

"'She is." In Jerry's dogged weary voice there was a queer note of pride.

"Well, last summer she appeared to be in love with me, very much so. I know how that sounds—what a rotter I seem, Jerry. But you've got to understand! Before I left camp, one evening after Sally was gone, we had a queer talk. She suggested things women of our kind don't suggest. Luckily I was engaged, so I played safe, but that little experience shows me how you got into this mess. Also I understand that her magnetism matches her beauty. But she's crooked, Jerry. Marion, with all her passion for manipulating her family, is worth a hundred of her. And Jim and Prim—"

Jerry turned away with a groan. All three of them recalled those two vivid youngsters, Prim's pink tiny face peeping from a starched sun-bonnet and small Jim's straight back and shining eyes, as large and dark and lovely as his grandmother's eyes.

After a long pause Jerry said slowly: "What the devil can I do about it, Don?"

"Exactly what I did. Cut and run. See her if necessary, but make her understand there's nothing doing. Meanwhile we'll see Marion, ask her to wait, to think things over."

"And do your work;" said Sally, "that will help. Oh, Jerry, you think Marion doesn't care. But she does, I feel sure she does! Only perhaps we all need to be shaken out of ourselves now and then—made to realize how much we have to lose."

Donald looked at his wife, then at Jerry. "Sally's right—this wretched muddle may do things to Marion, Jerry. She does care for you."

"She never wants to see me again," said Jerry sullenly. "Break with Helena; then wait. And now Sally and I must go. I hope to see Marion to-night."

After they had said good-by and left the room Donald went back alone.

"Jerry, one thing.—You meant to marry Helens; has she any hold over you that I don't know of?"

Jerry flushed a dull red.

"It—was a close call. But she was a visitor in my own house... If there's a divorce her name can't be used, though I don't know what Marion believes."

Donald grinned, embarrassed, but more relieved than he would have confessed, and though Jerry was looking gray and wretched, their eyes met squarely.

They shook hands. "Thank you, Don. And Sally. I'm sorry to have spoiled your honeymoon."

"It can't be done, old man; it's non-spoilable! See you again, probably to-morrow."

In the lobby downstairs Don found Sally, took her arm. "Come out to the park, hurry! We'll have an hour together, and dinner, before we tackle Marion."

They took a hansom, forgot everything but the fact that they were together in the place that was to mean home, and drove straight into the sunset.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE CITY OF TALL TOWERS

D^{ON} saw Marion in the evening, but left Sally to rest at their hotel, and that was a strange talk between brother and sister. Marion kept reiterating the gist of her letter:

"Do you suppose I am going to live with a man who loves another woman, Donald Graham? Is that your idea of dignity, decency?"

"The point is I feel no 'love' is involved. This woman you've believed in is—the word to describe her is biblical, not respectable. Life for her is one long man-hunt, and she rather prefers other women's property. Unattached men don't interest her. I suppose she finds them tame."

Marion started to speak but Don went on.

"You've tried to run Jerry ever since you were engaged, Marion, and he's sick of your success! After all he's a man, with a man's right to call his soul his own. You threw Helena at his head: for years he kept out of trouble. But when things were rotten at home he turned to the person who gave him what muddled married people are always looking for, sympathy! You're lucky that he has gotten off so easily!" "You mean she's not his mistress?"

"Certainly not! I don't deny he was hard hit. Beauty like Helena's is liable to go to any man's head. But Jerry is fundamentally decent and she couldn't have held him even if you divorced him and he married her—they'd separate within a year."

Marion was crying, quietly, hopelessly, and Don put his arm about her, hugged her to him.

"Poor little sis!"

"Finding one's a blind fool is hideous, Don. I believed in Helena: when she lied to people I blamed her husband's jealousy and tyranny, told myself that at least she was sincere with me! And I didn't suppose Jerry had it in him to care for another woman; he never looked at one, for ten years he's been all mine! And then to see them ... It was horrible!''

Don shrugged his shoulders, hesitated, at last said: "Marion, Helena's the type of woman apparently created to test men. If a poor devil can pull through an attack of acute Helena-itis he has a chance to live a decent self-respecting life!"

"And you believe Jerry will pull through !"

"I do. He's pretty sick just now, sick of emotion. You'd both better wait until the raw wounds heal. But when he comes back, for God's sake treat him as an adult, not the way you treat the babies! You've no right to bully him, especially when he gave up the work he chose because you wanted a lawyer for your husband. He shouldn't have yielded: that was his first blunder. To make a success of marriage you'll have to conquer not Jerry but yourself!"

This Marion with the blurred eyes, lined forehead and pallid lips was very unlike the dominant gay girl whom Jerry had married. She gave a sigh of exhaustion and said wearily:

"Go back to Sally, Don, and I'll get some sleep. I haven't had more than three hours a night for a week. And thank you—I'll try to remember all you've said, try to make myself over."

Donald was conscious of sudden humility. Surely he had been talking like one of your damned Pharisees as though he were superior to the foibles and follies of other people! He kissed her remorsefully:

"Sally's mother once said that 'anything can happen to anybody at any moment." When our turn comes we'll run to you for help, dear!"

Later, in the dark beside a lovely sleeping Sally, he was conscious first of blind happiness, a glowing assurance, and then as she still slept and he lay wakeful, keyed to a pitch of nervous excitement, he longed to rouse her, to know her conscious response to the passion that welled within him. Hour after hour he lay wide-eyed, restless, yet determined to get the better

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of a selfish impulse. Not to wake her somehow seemed the measure of his self-control, of his very love for her. And he wondered, lying there, what life would bring them, whether they would win the success they craved, whether he could make good in this huge, congested, over-stimulated community.

In the dim room reflected light from the street showed him Sally's face, a vanishing profile, a mass of loose burnished hair on the pillow, a bare rounded arm flung above her head. How amazing it was to have her for his own, to look ahead to years of this companionship, to feel so confident of her loyalty, her tenderness, her exquisite response to his own emotion, a response which he had been told some wives never gave. But Sallyah, she was gloriously alive, she loved him, not only with all her clean soul but with her strong body, those warm arms, and parted lips. And then, as he still refrained from touching her, she stirred in her sleep, murmured a name, his name, and like a child moved close, nestled against him, her loose hair against his cheek, her youth and warmth and vitality imparting a mysterious and exquisite content. In a moment he too was asleep, and when the clock struck three he did not hear it.

It was perhaps ten days later that Sally and Donald found their future home in the thirties, within walking distance of Donald's office. The apartment was in an old remodelled house east of Fifth Avenue, in a neighborhood already invaded by shops and loft buildings. Yet these six rooms on the top floor were large and airy, with a pleasant outlook over housetops south and west. From the three living-room windows one saw the slender minaret of Madison Square and beyond the soaring and gigantic Metropolitan Tower. Even the face of the great clock was visible, and at night the red and white lights which flashed the hour. An honest and competent old Scotchman had charge of the house; he and his wife lived in the basement, kept the halls immaculate, and attended to the furnace. Despite the convenience of the location the rent was still moderate as New York rents went, even in those early years. Marion's apartment on Madison Avenue was far more modish and expensive, yet no larger and in many ways less attractive, save for the breath-saving elevator and the dazzling foyer and liveried attendants.

To Sally the glimpse of the city over roofs, towers and the treetops in Madison Square—with a wide expanse of Western sky which gleamed with glorious colors at sunset time—this unexpected vista was well worth the long climb. As yet no tall building blocked their outlook and the houses in the rear and in the next street were in excellent repair, so it was possible that there might be no tearing down and rebuilding on modern lines for years to come. Mrs. Graham had promised Donald some fine old chests and highboys from the Long Island place, and Sally and Donald did some prayerful and joyous shopping among the antique stores on Fourth Avenue so that within a month the highceiled pleasant rooms had miraculously attained a look of home. As Sally wrote Anne:

"At least we have no ugly left-overs, no wedding gifts of the kind one longs to break or sell or otherwise dispose of, and I have kept to the Autumn day scheme of color that you and I have always loved. The rooms are brown and gold with touches of old blue, there are two open fireplaces, and in the living room there is a long Ferahahn rug covered with the leaves of sere November.

"It cost too much, that rug, but it is so restful that Don and I gloat over it continually, and the books on the shelves we've had built in are arranged to tone in with it, while the walls are the color of those brown and gold moths that flit about the north woods, and there are bits of brightness here and there, those tall Russian candlesticks you gave me, the old bronze inkstand on my desk which Aunt Laura brought back from Italy long ago, a few good landscapes in dull gold frames—and that lovely bit of Chinese embroidery, old blue and rusty gold, which Geoffrey gave us.

"As a whole it is quiet, yet sufficiently vivid to temper peace with adventurous hope! Already I have worked at my new old desk, written a couple of hours each day, and even sold some verse and essays, while Don uses his tiny study at night to think out details of plans that won't come right at the office. So we are really launched under our own small sail, and Anne darling, the uncharted seas before us seem to shine and gleam. . . . Happy? Oh, Anne, it seems almost criminal to be so glad in a world full of other people's troubles." That trouble which had cut short their honeymoon seemed now one of those dramas the climax of which might be indefinitely postponed. Having an opportunity to go to England on business for a client, Jerry decided to end the equivocal situation between himself and Helena by telephoning her the news of his impending departure. As he told Don afterward:

"I saw her twice; each time there was a scene, and when I'm with her she's convincing! Makes me feel like a yellow cur, as though I owe her every duty, rather than Marion."

Don nodded. "I know, old man. I guess that's an old trick."

"So when I found my ship sailed day after to-morrow I called her up on the telephone, told her that I was leaving town and would be gone indefinitely, said good-by."

"What did she say?"

"Hardly three words—just listened until I rang off. I've been wondering whether that uncanny knowingness of hers extends to my ship, the hour of sailing! If it does . . ."

"Do they know of your plans at the office?"

"Of course."

"Then forfeit your bookings and go later, on the Caritas. That sails Tuesday. I'll call at her hotel when you're supposed to have sailed, see whether she's still there. Are you going to say good-by to Marion and the children?"

"I want to," said Jerry humbly, "if she's willing." "She's got to be willing," said Marion's brother, shortly.

Donald's visit to Helena's hotel two days later revealed the fact that she had "suddenly left town," and the newspapers in their list of passengers sailing gave the name of Miss Helena Hart as well as of Jerry Ashe. Actually at the hour when Helena went down to dinner that first evening—and of course she had been placed at the Captain's table—Jerry was standing by the bedside of his small daughter, looking down at her chubby flushed cheeks and tossed hair and swollen eyelids. Sally, acting as cicerone and caretaker to Jerry in his own house, said softly:

"She cries for you every night, Jerry. Marion has managed to talk Jim into some sort of resignation for your absence. But Prim simply wails that she 'wants Favver to kiss her good night,' and nothing else will do."

Jerry said: "Is Marion going to see me, Sally?"

"Yes, dear. You are to go into your own study."

Jerry kissed Prim's small crumpled fist and went down the wide bright hall into the room which had been peculiarly his, feeling like an alien and a criminal. He waited, sitting beside his desk, remembering those tears on Prim's cheeks, and then he heard his own name spoken softly.

"Jerry!"

He sprang up, stood staring at a white-cheeked, thinfaced woman with lines in her forehead and about her mouth, a dark woman who had always carried her head like a race horse, but the small head was bent now. She looked older, compared to the dazzling Helena he had seen last, she was plain, yet Jerry Ashe was conscious suddenly that Helena no longer mattered, would never matter again. That old self-satisfied, dominating, contented Marion seemed to have vanished. Instead here was a woman who had suffered, a woman who had learned how infinitely precious and how frail may be the tie binding two who have loved, known marriage, faced the bitter winds of change.

Jerry had supposed that she might shake hands with him, planned that he would humbly ask permission to write to her and see her again after his return. But seeing this altered wife whose great dark eyes looked too big for her thin face he merely held out his arms and Marion walked into them with a low sobbing cry.

When he sailed, on one of the North German Lloyd steamers, it was after a night spent in his own home, breakfast with Jim and Prim, and a drive with Marion. When she kissed him good-by in his stateroom he held her in his arms, felt her salt tears on his cheeks. She said very very little, but that little stayed in his memory, blotting out bitterness and that trail of pervasive artificial fragrance which Helena had left. For this passion was real and clean and new-born, sprung as passion now and then does spring from the wells of memory, from the mingled sorrows and joys of a common past, and from the clarifying fires of pain.

Incidentally years were to pass before any of the Graham family were to meet Helena Hart again. But as Sally said to Donald one night:

"I have stopped hating Helena, Don. For she hurts others horribly, yet in the end her very falsity counts as a sort of yardstick to measure truth by! If there had been no Helena, Marion might never have known either Jerry or herself, never have found the deeper thing I sometimes thought they were missing..."

"What is this mysterious 'deeper thing,' Mrs. Graham?"

In a kimono and with her hair down, she came and sat on her husband's knee.

"I don't know the word, but it has something to do with marrying the right person,—perhaps your mother and father could tell us—after thirty-five years together."

Don was conscious of an elemental delight in this wife of his, and at the same time of an extraordinary curiosity.

"Thirty-five years! Sally, it's incredible that life should give any two people so much. I don't ask to see that far ahead, but I wonder what we'll be like—say in twenty years?"

And Sally wondered too—and then put the question by, for the first time in her life afraid of any change, incurious about to-morrow because of the golden beauty of to-day!

CHAPTER V

DEATH AND LIFE

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TO Sally, as to most of us, measuring one's life by years had already come to seem wholly inadequate. Rather one grew up, matured, grew old because of events, of crowded periods when a day might hold the emotional content of years, whereas many quiet years might pass leaving hardly any mark upon one's con-sciousness. So the little Sally who enjoyed a rare friendship with Alfred Buchanan had been a child possessed by the delight of fairy tales and a red sled. and then abruptly that shock in a quiet room seemed to end her childhood. Later on the years at boarding school, busy yet monotonous, altered very little the inner Sally even when the tall girl was outgrowing her short frocks and her limited vocabulary, but the point of contact where school definitely ended and the responsibility of becoming a grown-up began, again seemed to bridge a chasm of many years.

So now marriage and New York began a new period, and it was not until the end of the second year that Life again seemed to leap forward with a terrible impetus.

Sally visited Washington that winter, her last visit before the birth of her first child, and that month was a period of genuine happiness. Honor Dallam still kept the little house and still held her Department position, and there was nothing of the deserted and forlorn mother about her attitude. She cared for her home and her work, rejoiced in Sally's joy, and her friends in Washington kept in close touch with her. Sally, back among them all, was conscious of a fresh bright pride in this beloved and competent woman who seemed always younger than her years, tingling with that intense interest in events and the world of thought and progress which is supposed to belong solely to youth and early maturity.

It was during this visit that blind Sally first realized the quality and nature of the Doctor's devotion to Honor Dallam. The girl had come into the sitting room suddenly one evening and seen Dulaney's face as he stood for a moment looking down at his old friend, caught a sentence at once provocative and enlightening:

"Honor, am I always to play a waiting game? Your friendship is a tonic, but your love would make me young again!"

Sally, amazed, tongue tied, stood poised for instant flight, but Dulaney turned toward her, saying: "Don't go, child! Come and plead my cause. I need help!"

Mrs. Dallam, very pink and as embarrassed as Sally, said not a word, but the girl crossed the room, kissed her mother and then put her hand in the Doctor's.

"'It would be too wonderful!" she said. "Why, Mother, I'd be so glad that I'd be afraid it must be a sin! And yet he doesn't look guilty: he isn't blushing!"

Honor Dallam looked at them both, this tall daughter with her happy eyes and the deepening beauty which true marriage brings women, and her old friend, gray haired, middle aged, yet with something so like Anne about his eyes and mouth despite his lined, large featured, ruddy masculinity. His figure had grown a little heavier of late years, but he was a vigorous and handsome man, a man to be proud of, brilliant in his profession, what men call "a good mixer," and withal a little awkward and lonely and pathetic, as elderly men are apt to be when they have lost the thoughtful care of a beloved woman. And yet-always Honor found herself obsessed by the old fear, that marrying again would mean accepting a second best, giving a second best. And their friendship was so honest and simple and fragrant; it meant much to them both and she felt that a change of relation might impair the simplicity and banish the fragrance. And looking from Sally to the Doctor, she said as she had said before:

"I am so afraid of changes, so content with what we

have! Ah, don't ask me, Doctor. Sally, it's just a habit: he's really quite content as we are!"

"Am I?" asked Dulaney a little sadly. "All right, Sara, believe your mother. I suppose she knows!"

Two months later Honor Dallam sat in her own room writing to Sally. Later they found her lying back in her chair, very peaceful and still, with a faint color in her cheeks. Like Alfred Buchanan she had had an affection of the heart—a possible after effect of the operation she had undergone a year earlier—which even Dulaney had never discovered. So she too had gone without one day's illness, without an hour of mental disquiet, of that grim dread of becoming helpless and dependent which is the nightmare of vigorous people.

Sally in New York, already waiting at the hospital for her baby, looked up from a child's story she was revising, to see Don entering her room at ten o' clock in the morning. In his eyes she saw the look of the boy to whom she had told her trouble long ago. All his wisdom, his experience, his professional acuteness were washed from his face by that passion of sympathy which had brought him to her, even though he meant to tell her nothing now.

"Sally, my darling!"

"Don, what is it? Tell me!"

There was nothing to tell, he insisted, he had only wanted to see her before the evening; but Sally persisted that something was wrong, and at last he told her. In spite of his youth, his happiness, Donald himself was strangely conscious of the triumphant beauty of death which comes without pain or fear—death which is merely a passing from the life we know to that larger life we dimly divine.

"She went instantly, Sally. As we would have wanted her to go. She never knew illness, the depression that illness brings to older people. Now Anne and the Doctor are staying in the little house, attending to everything."

Sally sat still, looking at him with curiously blank eyes; Don felt she could not have understood, wondered whether he had done right to tell her now instead of waiting until after the child's birth, as he had intended. But his tell-tale face and Sally's knowledge of him had precipitated the crisis, and now her very effort for self-control brought her hour upon her.

In the night, an hour before dawn, she opened her eyes again on Donald's face, and this time she hardly recognized him, so gray and strange he looked, with that dazed anguish which comes to lovers of women who have been made fathers of sons.

The nurse laid an absurd atom in his arms, and Sally gazed at them both, a long look, piteous and yet triumphant. Don answered the question in her eyes:

"Darling, he looks like your mother already! And he's come at exactly the right time, hasn't he?"

She was too tired to smile, but her eyelids flickered, and then she was asleep.

When she woke again he was still there, or perhaps he had returned, and now she said in a voice low and weak, yet eager:

"I'm all right, Don; quite all right."

Her eyes closed again and she drifted into still deeper sleep. Looking at her white face and weary eyelids, Donald remembered the child Sally swimming so valiantly in the deep cool water of the sound. Sorrow and new life and mortal pain,—they had all come to her at once, but there was nothing of the coward in his Sally.

When she looked backward after this it seemed to Sally that the years became again like deep smooth water beyond jagged rocks and wild rapids. Yet learning to adjust oneself even to the happiest life, full of human interests and real work, requires subtle art and a clear recognition of values.

Small Don grew from babyhood into a restless atom in rompers and red gold curls, a stimulating entertaining little person. By this time Sally had written a number of children's tales, a few essays and stories published in several of the minor magazines. Then came a year or two of very slight production. As she expressed it to Anne, in New York on a visit:

"After all I suppose it doesn't matter whether I write or not, to any one but myself. Don earns the

living for us all, and it's my part to watch over him and Donny, and a man and a child seem to need an extra ordinary amount of care if they're to be kept well and happy."

She said this in the living-room one evening when Anne had asked what she was writing. At the moment Sally was mending some ragged little stockings while Donald in his corner read the evening paper and the Architectural Record, seeming lost to the world. But apparently he missed nothing that Sally did or said, and now he laid down his paper and walked into the conversation, turning it into a controversy.

"But why, Anne, should Sally mend stockings and make clothes when she sews abominably and writes well? Don is out for four hours every morning with a responsible nurse—why can't she spend that time doing work which will count more to the boy later on than the possession of a warped mother, turned seamstress?"

There was a note of irritation in his voice, and he added:

"I sometimes think women *prefer* to have their days turned into a damned crazy quilt, without pattern or plan—I suppose it's the path of least resistance!"

"Why Don!" Sally was sharply suprised, but Anne laughed.

"Don's on, Sally Dallam," she said with that touch of irony in her smile which Sally knew of old.

"What do you mean?" Sally demanded.

"Only that Don has discovered the kink in the minds of most women," said Anne. "It makes us shirk concentrated mental effort on the ground that we're "entirely occupied by domestic duties." You have two maids, Sally, one child, a comfortable apartment easy to take care of and the usual number of hours in your day. Yet you darn and mend and make desserts and dust your furniture instead of doing the one thing you do well!"

"But the stockings have to be darned," protested Sally.

"How much did you get for that short story you sold the 'Weekly World?'" asked Donald. "A hundred and twenty-five dollars."

"And how much would your mending and darning cost for say three months?" said Anne.

"I don't know," said Sally. And then she added soberly: "Oh, I could get a great deal of darning done for that, of course. You are both right and I've been a pusillanimous little softie! But the truth is—"

She hesitated, and Anne smiled.

"She means, Don, that just now her human interests are more vivid than her desire to write fiction. If I were married I'd probably find it hard to practise four hours a day."

Donald took off his glasses, polished them absently and stared at the two girls with eyes myopic yet extraordinarily keen.

"I've been watching fairly prosperous young married women for some time. And the thing that stumps me is why they live in a sort of swamp of sentiment and emotion. Of course men get into this swamp too. Nobody wholly escapes. But a man has possessive work gripping his mind seven or eight hours a day. He gets some respite from personal grief or worry: the more exacting his work the more complete the respite. But the very women men try hardest to protect are the least protected . . . Usually it's their own fault."

"Yet any mother has to put her children first, Don."

"Your mother brought you up pretty well and earned your living and hers," Anne broke in. "If she could have done it by something she cared for instead of routine work it would have been that much easier. It's your mother who has made us expect so much of you, Sally."

Sally's lip quivered, then her face hardened. She had not yet reached the stage when speaking of Honor Dallam was the unmixed joy it was to become in later years. Yet she realized that they were right, that she had been shirking the mental effort necessary for creative work, shirking because her life was so full that she had felt no need for further outlet.

That night in their room Don said vehemently:

"Sally, please understand me! I married the woman

I loved, if you never put pen to paper again you'll still be that woman. And perhaps I'll escape being labeled as 'Mrs. Graham's husband!' But if you give up writing you may regret it when it's too late. I'd hate to hear you talk as Mrs. Curran does—about marriage crippling a woman's faculties, cheapening her output. I saw Curran's face when she said that the other night."

Wallace Curran was an architect, able and successful, married to a popular young actress. Aline Vail had won a clean legitimate success of her own, and then at twenty-nine, when she was earning a generous income and starring in small exclusive New York theaters before a keenly appreciative public, she had married Curran and left the stage.

Now there were three little Currans; Aline at thirtyfive had lost much of her beauty and resilience, and had a way of harping upon the sacrifice she had made for her husband and children which hardly commended her to her husband's friends.

Sally stopped brushing her thick bright hair.

"Don, you know I could never be like Aline! In the first place I'm really in love with my husband."

"You mean she isn't?"

"I mean she's always cared for her own success, personal and professional, rather than for his. But your office, the buildings you design, the beauty you create these mean more to me than anything *I* could do."

"I know, Sally. It's a generous attitude, like you, and it worries me."

"But why?"

"Because," said Donald deliberately, "It was your mother, years ago who made me see that every one should be able to stand alone, women as well as men. I don't mean mere financial independence—though that's a good thing, usually,—but that each individual needs his own life of the mind, and is sure to need it more and more. Your ambition and independence attracted men, Sally, myself along with the others. You were more exciting than purposeless girls."

He hunted for an ash tray, lit a cigarette, and went on: "Of course Aline, after marrying Curran of her own free will, has no business complaining about the price she's paid. Yet I can see how she must miss the stimulus and personal satisfaction of her own work. In your case there's no necessity for such a sacrifice; the married woman with children ought to write better fiction just because of her wider experience, because she is married."

Sally lifted her hand: "Hush, dear. I hear Donny. Wait a moment."

She disappeared into the nursery, found a flushed and sleepy little son suffering from too many bed coverings and too little air, opened a second window and took off a superfluous spread.

Then she was back, saying:

"They're on your mind every blessed minute, Don." He smiled that canny smile of his. Sally had already discovered that with Donald love was not the blind passion described by sentimental poets.

"Of course they are, dear. I suppose any mother working at home must be interrupted fifty times a day. But hasn't it occurred to you that modern business mendoctors, lawyers, bankers, architects, brokers,—do their work in a whirling flood of interruptions! The telephone in my office rings twenty times a morning, in spite of a central office and managing clerk. We have to learn to concentrate so well that interruptions merely switch off the current for an instant, then we're back on the job."

Sally was thoughtfully dividing her hair into two loose braids, and watching his face in the glass. She said presently:

"Anne is right. I have been using you and Donny as a screen to hide my own mental laziness."

"Yet if you don't *want* to write Heaven knows I'm satisfied!"

Her face was luminous, her eyes eager.

"Oh, but I do! I'm a glutton, want everything, you and Donny, the peak I climb when writing a new verse, planning a story—the solid satisfaction of getting them over. And praise—I'm greedy for it—like that letter from the dean of the western college who liked the story in *Every Week* so much—remember?"

Donald nodded. "I remember. I was proud of that letter, Sally. Yet I want you to understand that your success as a writer matters to me only for your own sake. You've filled my life, made my home, given me my son. You've always meant joy, adventure, all I've wanted most. So you see . . ."

Sally finished braiding her hair and came toward him.

"I see. But oh, think of all the people missing it what we've found."

He caught her roughly to him.

"Don't waste your pity, darling! Half of them would regard us as sentimental idiots, let loose in their Hell of a world. People believe in just what they personally experience—and very little else!"

"Yes," said Sally, "and how they will hate us, if it lasts, all the grumpy married people who wish they hadn't, and the professional pessimists, married and single!"

CHAPTER VI

ON THE TRAIN WITH ANNE

DURING this visit Anne seemed to Sally prettier than she had ever been, and with a distinction, a mental vigor which won the interest of the men she met, and made entertaining her anything but a burden. Yet she seemed graver, more mature. As she told Sally, the loss of Mrs. Dallam had made a great hole in the Doctor's life, and this fact had reacted on Anne, and even on his patients.

"He is older, Sally, tired so often, and he needs me more than ever. I think I'm glad now that—" She broke off and Sally said:

"Anne darling, isn't that situation altered yet? All the others—can't you care for any of them?"

Anne sat straight on the couch where she had been lying, and her hands were clenched so that they were as white as her moonbeam forehead between the shadow of dark hair.

"If I just could! I tell you, Sally, this thing has made me understand men, made me see why they do wild things, why a woman who plays with a man can wreck him utterly! Only in my case nobody has been to blame but myself. I'm such a hopeless helpless fool!" She paused, then went on swiftly, for the first time indicating unmistakably the identity of this man whom she loved.

"He comes all the time, tells me of his work, and Sally, he is becoming one of the best surgeons in Washington, for that matter in the country! It's not only that he has skill and power, but he counts to his patients in other ways, helps them recover their grit, their will to live. It's the same thing he showed as a boy, when he couldn't bear to see animals sick or hurt or abused, a sort of beautiful, terrible pity for all who suffer ... Sometimes I feel the reason he doesn't care for me is because he thinks I have everything, don't need his help, the way many women do. And seeing him this way, intimately, frequently—oh, I want it, and yet there are times when I tell myself that I must get away where I can never meet him, that I can't stand the strain of this sweet placid friendship—as he sees it!"

Sally touched her hand. "Darling, I do understand so! Can't you avoid him?"

"But how? When he and Father are such pals, caring for each other's work and constantly in touch professionally? And then—Sally, you remember how as girls we hated losing our friends just because we couldn't marry them? Well, I ask myself why shouldn't Jim have what he needs from me—sympathy, interest, a friendly affection? I can give him these, give him more than he realizes, a sense of home. Since Senator and Mrs. Graham left Washington last year Jim has been lonely."

Sally saw it all—how hard it would be for Anne to break with Jim, and how real a loss to the young doctor himself. Again she felt that intense irritation, that sense of foolish waste. After all where would Jim find any woman sweeter or finer, possessing more talent and charm, than Anne? Or one who could love him better, serve his work more efficiently and devotedly?

Anne lay back again on Sally's divan, and her slender figure, the contours of her face, the contrast between her dark cloudy hair and the camelia fairness of her brow and cheeks with those scarlet lips, sweet yet firm, all of her small exquisite person seemed to Sally lovelier than ever before. Only yesterday at a pleasant studio tea where Sally had introduced Anne to some of her own new friends Anne had had instant success. She had consented to sing, too, and Sally remembered the young tall man with the black mustache and splendid shoulders, an illustrator of some note, who turned the leaves of her music and looked at her with an expression of eager curiosity. Afterward Sally had heard him say:

"Miss Dulaney, if you don't ask me to call I shall wish I had not met you," and Anne had laughed and complied casually enough, but the man had not smiled. Sally noticed that he hovered near them all the afternoon, listened to all Anne said, watching her with a sort of fascinated detachment even while he appeared to be occupied with other women. And Grierson was a man of personality and power, a man whom women desired to attract, yet to Anne he seemed quite unimportant because of her obsessing preoccupation with Jim, this obstinate, unchanging, secret passion full of a tragic beauty and a yet more tragic pain.

Sally said now: "I suppose it's cold comfort, Anne darling, but it, or *something*, has made you ten times as attractive as you used to be. You draw people instantly, women as well as men. Don said the other night: 'Even her singing is warmer, richer, more personal than it was. And the woman is bigger than her voice.' Then he added in a puzzled sort of way: 'I can't see how old Jim escapes falling head over heels in love with her.'"

Anne's dark eyes blazed and she got up and stalked up and down the room like some animal in a cage. "Sally Dallam, do you suppose Don guesses what an idiot I am?"

"Of course not, goose! No man ever discovers for himself that a woman's in love with some other man! But he loves both of you, wants you and Jim to have what we have found—thinks it's the one thing worth having!"

Anne sighed, paced on, and then said curtly: "It is, of course. But Sally, if there had been no Don do you suppose you would have married Geoffrey?"

⁷'How can I tell? Geoff is a very big person, but I can't see myself marrying any one but Don."

"And yet, well, you had a good many love affairs, Sally."

"But somehow the others didn't *rhyme!* I suppose marrying is like writing verse; you have to find the right word or the whole thing is spoiled."

Anne came and sat on Sally's knee.

"That's exactly it! They don't rhyme! But, oh, Sally, Sally, I want it all, now, while I'm young, while I'm pretty, while anything, everything is possible! I'm sick of having men make love to me—the wrong men! sick of feeling starved and lonesome and cold while other people are fed and warm and happy! Sick of telling myself that I've got to make Jim give back my heart before it quite breaks. Oh, being a woman, young, proud, even attractive—it's all sheer *Hell* when you love the man who doesn't love you back!''

Sally held her tight and said no word. Anne went on, swiftly, passionately, as she had never spoken before and might never speak again:

"I'm trying to keep from being hard and bitter, trying to be kind and fair to other men, even to Jim. For the maddening thing is that he does love me, does need me, only not the way I love and need him! And it takes all my strength and control not to let his lack of response spoil my life—spoil Dad's life! Sally, being decent when you're unhappy is the hardest thing on this earth!"

"Yes," said Sally, "I know it!" And suddenly she found herself remembering Alfred Buchanan, and that time, long ago, when she had entered his room and smelled that curious smell. She wondered why this vivid picture should spring upon the sensitive plate of her mind. Then she said gently to Anne:

"Doesn't my caring count just a little, Anne darling! And Dr. Dulaney's, little Don's!"

Anne said after an instant: "Yes, Sally. I couldn't go on without it! And yet of course I could. I'd have to; one has to live whether one is happy or wretched—to bluff, play the game."

At this point little Don came into the room. He had a pink paper cap on the small head which was fuzzy yellow, like a dandelion, and he carried a wooden gun and roared ferociously when he saw his mother and Anne because he was "a dreat big sojer killin' Injuns." He especially desired Anne's scalp, and presently Anne was on the floor, all her lovely dark hair pulled down, with Donny kneeling beside her crying fiercely:

"Die, you bad bad Injun! Muvver, please let me dig a gwave to bury her under ze bed in your room. It's weally a black forest, you know, wif awful hungwy wolves hidin' in the dark . . .''

Sally, leaving them to answer an insistent telephone, found that the baby's words had brought tears to her eyes. Were hungry wolves hiding in everybody's black forest, biding their time?

The tall young illustrator came to see Anne and took her to the theater and sent her flowers and went through all the motions of swift courtship during that three weeks' visit. When Anne left he was at the train, and it seemed that he was going to Baltimore on businesshe did not reveal its nature---so that Sally and small Don left the two together in the chair car and waved them both good-by from the platform. And, though this was never revealed to Sally, Anne had a bad time on that trip through a golden Autumn day. Grierson was the sort of man who accepts no hints or subterfuges. He loved Anne Dulaney, and he meant to tell her so and to win her response if it were humanly possible. They sat at the end of the car. Anne facing ahead. Grierson's chair swung sidewise so he could watch her profile, her clasped hands, her beautiful little head. And as soon as they were well started he was off. He loved her, had never known before what a woman could be to a man, wanted beyond anything in life to marry her. And if he couldn't he insisted upon knowing why. He was twentyeight years old, last year he had earned six thousand dollars through his work, and now Harper's had given him a commission to illustrate several books which would increase his earnings during the current year. Besides this he had a small income inherited from his motherthis he would instantly settle upon his wife, and together thev could manage comfortably, even luxuriously. Money aside, he believed that she would care for his work, his friends, his family: he had two brothers and four small nieces and a nephew: every one of them would adore her. And he was not the kind of man to give up easily. Never before had he wanted to marry a woman, although there had been little affairs, moods, flirtations.

"I'm no saint, Anne Dulaney, but I can look you straight in the eyes. Tell me that I've got a chance!"

Anne hardly turned her head. She liked him so, and she had tried to show that liking was all, but he was not easy to manage. She said at last, slowly:

"I tried to keep you from saying all this, Mr. Grierson."

"I had to sav it! The feeling is stronger than anything in my whole life. Even when my father and mother died I did not care so much. I tell you, I love you,-with all my strength, with every atom of my brain and every drop of my blood! Dear. can't von feel it, like a great warm wave!"

His queer eloquence, his shining eyes, his boyish conviction that he had but to ask in order to receive, more than all her feeling that he was one of those fastidious young men interested only in fastidious women, these things made Anne want to put her hands in his and say: "Make me love you! Oh, do it. I will help!"

What she actually said was:

"God knows I want to love you, but I can't!"

He laughed softly, relief, humor, that youthful eagerness in his voice:

"Darling, love is so easy, when you let yourself go. Just do that, let me sweep you out on the ocean of itthe great gray sea, with the sky overhead growing brighter and brighter! Love is so wonderful, Anne, I never dreamed anything could be so beautiful!"

"Oh I know," said poor Anne. "I have known for years. Mr. Grierson, that's the whole trouble-I knew all this long before I ever met you!"

"But you aren't married; you are free. And it's you I've been waiting for always, this little, warm, wonderful Anne! If we weren't in this horrible car with these damned people, I'd make you know!"

"But Mr. Grierson, it's useless, because-because there's a man I've known since I was sixteen."

"But you have not married him; you are free!"

"Because he doesn't love me," Anne said steadily. "I would have married him any moment, day or night, for years. I would go to him across the world, penniless, on foot, alone! I'm mad about him and very miserable. God knows I would have spared you this if I could!''

He sat stone still, his young face hardening under her eyes.

The train went on and on, the day deepened from full gleaming beauty to twilight and then to dusk, the people behind them might have been made of paper or wood for all they counted. Anne felt a wave of anguish, not merely her own but the pain of this hot-headed absurd man creature whom she would have liked to take in her arms and comfort as one comforts a disappointed child. But under his clipped mustache his mouth was one straight line and his eyes smoldered. There was nothing boylike about his expression now. He said at last:

"I will get off at the next station and go back. I would like to kill that man you care for."

"But why?" said Anne. "He doesn't know that I care. How could he? And if he did what good would it do? We can't make ourselves love the people we would like to love any more than we can unlove the others."

He looked at her squarely, and she had never seen eyes more wretched. "Poor blind fool! Somebody ought to tell him!"

He got up to go, the train was slowing down. Then he leaned over her, perfectly oblivious of all those other people, kissed her twice, hotly, passionately. Anne was conscious of a strange healing sweetness in those kisses.

It was as though they vindicated her womanhood, her dignity, her right to be loved.

Then she knew a swift fear; she pulled him down to his seat again.

"Just one moment. I want to say something."

The train bumped, started, stopped again. Grierson sat beside her, very quiet and white. "Well?"

Anne's low voice was passionate:

"Don't let it hurt you, this feeling for me! For years I've been trving to keep my own love clean of envy and bitterness. It has been hard, but I have never given. up trying. For if we're just big enough we can win strength, understanding, even from pain. And this feeling of yours has come so quickly. It is so—young. Don't let it spoil everything, *please!*"

His face changed, he smiled. He bent down and kissed her hand.

"I won't, my darling!"

Then he was gone, and Anne wondered whether she had dreamed the whole scene. But she smelled the violets he had given her—and presently her mind was traveling the old trail, to Jim. And because her fight had been successful and she had not grown bitter her little sad face became strong and tender, as it always was when she was alone with the thought of this man who, at least, was always her friend.

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CHAPTER VII

NEW FRIENDS, AND A DRIVE WITH DON

URING the next year Sally refashioned the fabric of her daily life. It was not easy at first to construct a working plan for each day instead of keeping what Don had called the "damned crazy quilt." but she found, building on the fact that the little boy was usually out of the apartment all the morning, that she could arrange her marketing and modest housekeeping so as to give her from three to four hours for her writing. This seemed very little, at first, but, as she defined more clearly the schedule for the two maids, and won quietness of mind. she found that several hours of concentrated work every morning meant a good deal of solid achievement by the end of each week. And her next step was to train her friends in New York-even Marion and her children-that those morning hours could not be broken in upon: and this was a difficult feat.

For she discovered that women who do not themselves accomplish a definite amount of mental work each day are hard to convince that another woman's time is valuable, save only when she has what is popularly known as a job, earning a fixed amount toward the support of her family. For instance when she spoke of her new plans to Aline Curran, even that clever and capable person remarked:

"What does it matter whether you earn money or not, when Don is doing so well?"

"But why should that cut me out of the work I want to do?" said Sally. "Don is right. I sew abominably, Jenny cooks much better than I do, while the physical things that Don's nurse does for him are better done than they would be if I played nurse twenty-four hours a day. So doing something that neither Jenny nor Bridget could do seems intelligent, especially as I am always happier when I'm writing, and so Don and little Don have a better time!"

"There's something in *that*," said Aline. "Heaven knows my life nowadays sags into a dull routine, compared to those years when I was on the stage. The children are pretty nice, but domesticity gets on one's nerves horribly."

"Why don't you get up a class and teach dramatic art a certain number of hours a week?" said Sally. "You'd turn out real actors, and your mouth corners would lift up again as they used to do in those lovely photographs taken before I met you."

Aline shrugged her shoulders. "My dear child, Wallace would have convulsions at the suggestion. Your Donald may be a twentieth century husband, but Wallace isn't even early Victorian. He's pre-historic!"

Sally had had her own suspicions when she heard Don talking of Curran's ability and charm and of his wife's dissatisfaction. She concluded that a man's business associates do not always know his temperamental bent as a wife knows it, and she said a passionate prayer of thanksgiving to the gods that Don was just—Don!

Certainly he made every effort to help her with her work, and it was indirectly through him that Sally finally met a man who was destined to count as her literary adviser and critic over many years.

She had sent some stories and essays to a magazine of prestige, and though these were not accepted the editor wrote her several personal notes containing suggestions of distinct value. Finally he wrote that he would be glad to meet and talk with his would-be contributor, and after some hesitation and prodding from Donald, Sally went to the office of Gray's Magazine, and was shown first into an imposing waiting room, all massive center table covered with magazines, mahogany paneling and framed originals of illustrations. The room was wellgroomed, impersonal and chilly, like the manner of a society woman who dislikes you but considers that she sufficiently conceals this fact under surface polish. Sally felt lonesome and discouraged; the office boy seemed to view her with a dispassionate appraising eye, and the place had no windows of any sort and a superfluity of very noisy steam heat. But when she had sent in her card the boy came back, grinned amiably, and remarked that Mr. Gaunt would see her at once.

In a little room full of learned looking books, with two huge windows hanging over a majestic canyon of stone and iron, a thin faced, homely man sat in a swivel chair before a desk completely covered with letters and manuscript, arranged in orderly piles.

Peter Gaunt at this time was in the late forties, a lean man with high cheekbones, dark eyes, rough gray hair and heavy grizzled eyebrows that protruded from his profile almost as markedly as did his Roman nose To Sally he was obviously a person of delicate physical constitution and an iron will. He spoke in a pleasant husky voice:

"Well, Miss Graham, I'm glad you have come at last. Or are you married, in spite of your forehead?"

Sally laughed.

"I didn't know I had an unmarried forehead," she said. "But I also have a husband, Donald Graham. He is an architect, with the firm of MacDonald, Mann and Waite. And it was my husband who insisted that I accept your invitation."

Gaunt smiled at this, indicated a chair, and said briefly:

"Sounds like an intelligent young man, Mr. Donald Graham, Architect." And then he added sharply: "What do you want to do, Mrs. Graham? Earn pin money writing little stories, or sweat and struggle to turn out good work?"

Sally wondered whether this was a sample editor or an exceptional editor. He impressed her as the latter, but perhaps in order to be an editor at all one had first to be exceptional. Something about his earnestness reminded her of her English professor in Washington years ago. And she liked him, this rather abrupt man with the lank delicate figure and the intent eyes beneath those beetling brows.

"I want to write short stories that you will buy-and really like," she replied after a hesitant moment. "And I suppose I came to find out what you want." acl

For ten moments he told her what he did not wanter assailed one of the stories she had sent him as ultraz romantic, arraigned her for a happy ending "utterbia improbable and absurd." Sally grew hot and pink B She began: "But I read a story in your magazine ..."

Gaunt put up both hands. "Help!—For God's sake" "E don't tell me what you've read in my magazine. There as are three readers and two editors who decide on every to piece of fiction we print, all influenced by what they T think the public wants, and the advertising department ab I am treating you to my own personal convictions, not at my conventional procedure as a magazine editor. And si that word 'happy,' as you young writers use it, what for does it mean? Merely a passing phase, evanescent as first youth, characterless as vanilla ice cream, a youngmarried glamor which wears off in the first few years." H

Sally settled herself in her chair and her eyes sparked dangerously. Their talk during the next half hour was one of the keenest mental pleasures she had known, and she left Gaunt's office with a fresh impetus toward work, and a desire to produce the caliber of story which this hypercritical yet discriminating person should pronounce good.

Within the next few years she sold him a number of stories and gained in many ways through Peter Gaunt's training and experience. He suggested books for her to read, introduced her to other writers, and even came to the apartment on rare occasions, meeting the two Dons and winning for himself a very real welcome from them both.

It was through Gaunt that Sally met the Marlins, destined to become real and lasting friends. At that first luncheon in a pleasant little restaurant near Gaunt's office Sally found herself talking to a tall woman with a coronet of blonde hair. Her husband was eagerly discussing with Gaunt some new process for reproducing drawings in color.

It seemed that Marlin was a landscape painter whose work Sally and Donald both knew well, and that Lois Marlin was a writer of verse. The two women looked each other with interest and fell into talk about a new riter whose novel was appearing serially in Gaunt's agazine. The tale in question seemed to them both .

"But then of course Mr. Gaunt believes that happiness banal," said Sally.

"He doesn't 'believe' at all,'' said Mrs. Marlin. And added, after a swift inspection of Sally, "I'm afraid thinks that you and I bluff, Mrs. Graham."

They looked at Gaunt, but he was still absorbed in his bibject, for the moment utterly unconscious of any one but Marlin, so Lois and Sally went on with their own explorative talk. Mrs. Marlin asked Sally to her studio for tea the next day.

"I say the studio, but if Ben is working I shall probably drag you into my own private lair. You see when he's painting he likes to feel alone—in the trackless desert of New York."

"But if you write don't you feel the same way?" said Sally.

Mrs. Marlin smiled, she was lovely when she smiled.
"Theoretically, yes. Actually I've learned to work any time, anywhere. I've had to, for my family live here, I have a mother and a married sister with children—which is why I write nothing but verse, trifles that don't re-

^c quire concentration."

Sally had read some of these "trifles" and she said impulsively:

"But they are beautiful, moving . . . that poem which
 Mr. Gaunt used last month, 'The Dreamer', haunted me for days."

"'I'm so glad; yet Mrs. Graham, it seems strange that you should care for that poem."

"Why?" asked Sally.

"Because it is introspective, subjective, rather tragic. And you are so-radiant."

"I'm very happy," said Sally soberly. "Yet can't lucky people know how lucky they are—and understand that Life may grow somber at any moment?"

Over their dessert they were conscious of a surprising intimacy. And Mrs. Marlin said: "How little Mr. Gaunt knows women, even if he knows everything else! He spoke to us about you but I should never have recognized you, from his description!"

In Lois Marlin's characteristic sitting-room the next day they talked for hours, exchanged personal experiences, little intimate memories of childhood. When Sally left, Lois Marlin took both her hands:

"Mrs. Graham, the woman I've loved best in my lifedied three years ago. I have my own family, plenty of casual acquaintances, but very few intimates. Now that we've met I hope you and I are going to be friends, real friends."

The two hands gripped, and all the way home Sally felt rich, grateful to Gaunt, eager to write Anne of her new discovery. But that night in the small hours she awoke, recalled their talk. wished that Don were also awake. For in the very intensity of her interest. this recovered power for winning to herself new ties of affection, she discovered a dim dread. Instinctively she knew that one bond between Lois Marlin and herself was the consciousness of their common, or uncommon happiness. For Lois too was rightly mated, conscious of the fact. Each woman was living the vivid life of both the senses and the eager explorative mind. But in the dark Sally remembered those two whom she had loved with such depth of feeling and understanding-and lost. She found herself imagining a life without Donald, living on alone in a changed world. The thought of women's friendships became suddenly not a vivid pleasure but a sharp pang. She recalled women she knew who lived together, depending upon each other for companionship, for happiness, outwardly gay, yet in some strange way mysteriously sad. She remembered Anne, all they had been to each other, and yet the fact that often her own happiness must have cut Anne to the quick, aroused a pang of envy, a longing for such a life as Sally was living.

In the still room with the wind blowing through open windows Sally forgot her work, her personal ambitions. Suddenly she was facing the strange dread of the future which is the one drop of gall in the cup of the completely happy. To-morrow-what might it not bring of unknown, undreamed experience, of bleak loss!

Donald awoke suddenly, his voice came to her with a shock of pure joy.

"Sally! You're crying . . ."

He felt her hot hands, extracted finally the obscure reason for her tears.

"Because you've found a new friend . . . or because she may die, some day, or I may die! Which is it, Sally?"

"Of course I'm absurd, Don. But don't laugh. Remember the way you felt, long ago, when your first friend died, that boy who caught so many porgies,—I've forgotten his name."

Don remembered, and did not laugh. His arms and his few shy words were comforting, "shy" because, like most men of Anglo-Saxon inheritance, he usually evaded analysis of emotion. Later, when he was again asleep Sally found herself passionately thanking God or Fate or whatever It might be, for laughter, love, youth, for this blessed nearness married folk take for granted, as though the lighted fire must forever burn.

Perhaps it was then that she first longed for a girl child who should form one more link in the frail chain of mortal loves.

About a year later a daughter was born to them, a tiny perfect creature who only lived a few brief days. Sally herself came so near death, hovered so long on the borderland, that Donald was frightened as he had never been before. When at last she was safe and he had her to himself, free from the beneficent tyranny of doctors and nurses, he breathed a long sigh of relief.

They were driving through the park in a hansom, the May sun warmed them, the sky was as blue as it had looked above that jeweled lake in the Adirondack hills. Donald crushed Sally's hand against his knee.

"Sally, it mustn't happen again. The doctor says it would be dangerous."

"If she had just lived, little Honor! Oh, Don, why did this have to happen?"

"Hardy doesn't seem to know, says things go wrong now and then, unaccountably, and with the strongest women. But I can't have your life risked again—for some stranger baby. I won't, Sally!"

"Once Donny was a 'stranger baby'!" said Sally. "And the next time everything may go like clockwork, as normally as when Donny came."

"There isn't going to be any next time," said Donald fiercely. For the moment he looked like his father in some political wrangle, tenacious, uncompromising. He added in another tone: "Sally, you don't know what it is, watching your wife go down into a black pit—when you can't follow, can't help. While things seemed normal I was willing. We've both wanted children. But now there really is great danger. Hardy is no alarmist— Jim knew him at Hopkins, says he's an exceptionally able man. So that phase is over. After all it's a question for individual choice, thank God."

Sally shivered at those memories of blind pain. Then in the privacy of the shabby old hansom she clutched his hand tightly. How vital and stimulating he was, after those weeks of helplessness and solitude when the doctor had allowed her to see even her husband for only a flashing moment in the dragging day. She said slowly:

"It's enough, having you and Donny! I'm satisfied. And I'm aching for the feel of a pen between my fingers again. It was dreadful when it looked as though I might never write another story."

She added presently:

"Get him to drive past that new apartment house on Park Avenue, Don. I want to see it again, with you."

The building was one which Donald had designed and built; and as they passed it a little later Sally said:

"It has beauty, real distinction, the sort of thing they once thought couldn't be managed in very high buildings."

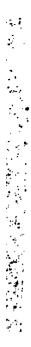
The architect looked at his work with the critical detachment characteristic of him. "My problem wasn't easy, with that eyesore to the south. But they'll tear it down in a year or two. All the members of the firm have congratulated me, and Waite called the job 'a realization that bettered expectation'."

He added after an instant, in that low, tense voice Sally knew so well:

"But it's nothing to what I'm going to do, by the time I'm forty, forty-five."

She agreed, and they relaxed into silence as fancy soared to the peak of those wonders yet to come. Resolutely they both suppressed the secret ache for that tiny girl who might have grown up worthy of Honor Dallam's name.

The hansom rolled down the wide, rapidly changing avenue in the spring sunshine, and youth, love, tingling joy, awoke in them pungent desires, vigorous ambitions, gratitude to the high gods for what they already possessed, what they were still to accomplish, and always together.



BOOK IV

PAYING THE PRICE

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CHAPTER I

THE HOUSE ON THE SHORE

I twas a simple and atomic place compared to all those ornate palaces on the North Shore, but it possessed what even small persons and inexpensive homes may possess, proportion, symmetry, beauty of line and tone. A green-shuttered white house on the knoll looked out over the water and the shore road, with a lawn, rolling and velvety yet not prim, a few fine old trees, a tiny flower garden to the left, full of lilacs in April, of roses in June, of flowering shrubs and hollyhocks in midsummer and in the Autumn gay with a riot of nasturtiums; while from porch and windows your eye rejoiced in the sheen and color of the Sound.

It was when little Don Graham began to wake the echoes of the apartment house in New York and complaints from boyless tenants materialized almost daily that his father began to plan a country house on Long Island where the family could spend at least eight months of each year. At first Sally opposed the scheme: she had had always a boundless pity for commuting mankind, but small sons invariably make large demands upon parental sacrifice, especially in a city where children are regarded as a public nuisance rather than a racial necessity. So it ended by the Grahams buying a few acres through Jerry Ashe-three young Ashes had already reduced Marion and Jerry to the humble estate of suburbanites-and presently the house which Donald had planned with such skill and care became a sunny refuge from all the wear and tear of town, a place where noise was tolerated—boy noise, after all less exhausting than roaring trains and trollevs-where air and sunlight and space were not mere words, and where clean winds from the far seas caressed your cheeks and soothed your spirit.

As a by-product of this investment little Don grew tall and strong, a cheerful young Turk, able to swim like a fish and paddle like an Indian and manage any sort of water craft and ride any animal obedient to bridle. His cousins, Jim and Prim and their small sister Laura, lived not two miles away, and the white house often rocked with the riotous noise of all four children until Sally, writing in her sunny garret, stopped work to discover whether Bedlam also meant sudden death or the total destruction of everything in the house. It was extraordinary how much turmoil they could create—those four—and yet how little damage they really did, and what glorious times they had.

One September day an animated game of tennis was being played in the court just back of the flower garden, the participants being Jim and Prim, Sally and her son, while slim dark-eyed Lola alternately applauded the game and read her Uncle Don's battered copy of "The Tale of Two Cities." This happened to be one of Lola's quiet days. Usually she was a small person attached to twinkling black stockings that seemed to leap over the world with a mad irrelevance, appearing to have a personality of their own.

This afternoon Sally and Jim were scoring at tennis much to the chagrin of Prim and Donny who considered themselves champion players. If Sally sometimes declared herself elderly and obsolete her tennis was by no means obsolete, for she could spring at a ball with the lithe grace of the Sally of long braids and short skirts. In what she called "the galloping late thirties" she was broad shouldered and deep chested, still young in line and tint, with that look of glowing health and a sort of balanced and thoughtful joyousness which had characterized Honor Dallam. But Sally wore prettier clothes, did work that she loved as a medieval knight adored his lady, was applauded by a successful husband and a tall son, with a background of sheltering devotion which Honor had never known.

This afternoon when the game ended, Don and Prim winning after all, the four players sauntered toward the tea table on the piazza. Already a young black-haired

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distinctly chic French maid had drawn up chairs, arranged the tea tray and deposited a dish of crisp homemade cakes upon a highboy beyond the reach of sundry always hungry canines. One of these, a young tall Saint Bernard, grandson and namesake to the Harry Hotspur beloved of Sally Dallam long ago, paid no attention to the four people whom he knew coming down the lawn. Instead he was walking sedately, with an air of insatiable though controlled curiosity, toward a tall man who had passed through the small white gate from the road. Lola, for the moment demure, a slim rosy child of thirteen, "Two Cities" under her arm, had joined the stranger, her eyes as curious and almost as big and dark as the eyes of Hotspur.

She was saying: "Here comes Aunt Sally now. She's been playing tennis and her hair is mussed. But I don't b'lieve you'll mind."

The tall man wore a trim uniform, khaki colored cloth well cut and extremely becoming to a square-shouldered straight-backed figure.

He smiled at the tall child, spoke to the Saint Bernard in a language understood by dogs, and as Sally in her short white frock and tennis shoes advanced toward the piazza he watched her curiously, until suddenly she swerved from the others and came rapidly toward her niece and the tall stranger.

"Geoffrey Kent, of all wandering scribes! I thought you were still in France!"

"I have been and soon shall be again. This is just a brief respite," said Kent, taking both her hands and looking down upon her flushed cheeks and wind-blown hair with a glance which combined eager curiosity with rather a fine courtesy.

"Nearly five years, Sally, and if anything you look younger! How do you manage it?"

"Imagination and manners," scoffed Sally. "I'm a rapidly aging person and my son is nearly sixteen and looks twenty. Come here Don, and speak to your Uncle Geoff."

Don came, and Sally was right. He was a tall mature youth, not in the least gangling, and if his small head had once worn the innocently fluffy appearance of a dandelion he now had the air of a dark-eyed, sophisticated young aristocrat, like his paternal grandmother in slender length of limb and fiery glance, and yet more like Honor Dallam in the brilliance of a fair skin deepening to warm color in the cheeks, and with Honor's look of amazing vitality. He was a beautiful youth, strong, straight, radiant, and as Kent looked at him he recalled two vivid lines:

> "He trod the ling like a buck in Spring And he looked like a lance at rest."

The man and the boy shook hands: Don had heard much of Uncle Geoffrey, had read his slashing, beautifully written romance called "Spanish Spurs" and a number of recent articles upon the War in Europe: since the Autumn of 1914 Geoffrey had been war correspondent for a great Chicago daily. Now he was back, he told them, to try and rouse his own country to a realization that America also was involved in the success or failure of "Hun Kultur." Five minutes after his coming that afternoon the little group of young people were listening to his account of Paris at bay, and Sally was pouring tea and wondering whether she was criminally selfish to have been so happy an hour ago. Quite suddenly the world seemed changed, not yet terrible or tragic in this peaceful spot, but curiously expectant. It was like an Autumn day when the gleaming tints of October vie with the green of summer lawns, when the sun shines and vet there's a suggestion of frost, when there's a look as though any moment the figure of grim Winter may come striding across the hills, snow and storm in his great right hand, tingling cold expanding his thin nostrils. mad winds blowing his long hair and white beard . . .

She came back to earth to hear Donny's eager question: "Have you seen many of our boys driving ambulances?"

Geoffrey answered quietly: "Quite a number, clean game husky youngsters. And their work is good, their enthusiasm like a new elixir of life. For you see the

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boys of England and France have been dying every day like flies."

Jimmy Ashe began asking questions with the rapidity of a gatling gun. He and Primmy had both grown into tall handsome youngsters, Jim dark and thin and eager, like his namesake uncle. Primmy fair, with hair that still curled like golden fluff. Jim was at Yale, or would be in another week, his Senior year, and Primmy was due at Bryn Mawr in four days. This might be the last gathering of the quartette until they met in New York at Christmas. 'All of which "Uncle Geoffrey" was told when finally he got a chance to ask some questions on his own account. He heard that Marion and Jerry Ashe had gone off on a holiday trip, that Jerry was prospering, one of the junior members of a growing New York And in turn he told Sally how Anne and the law firm. Doctor had looked in Washington a week ago, and also he discoursed for ten minutes upon Jim, his splendid practise as a surgeon and some of the amazing things he had done during the last year.

"I told him that we need him over there, and I rather think he'll manage to come," said Geoffrey.

Sally thought of Anne: so far as she knew that situation had not changed in all the years, but she said:

"Geoff, you're as one ideaed as you used to be. The War is all you think about now."

"It is," said Geoffrey. "And before we're through it will challenge the attention of every mother's son of us. And next year we shall be in ourselves, up to the neck."

Sally looked at the two boys; it was strange how hard it was to realize this thing, how indecently happy they still were. But Geoffrey looked worn, there was a lock of white hair behind his left ear, there were deep lines carved between his eyes. She wondered; were they marks of war or just the wear and tear of life?

At dinner time Donald appeared in his car, no expensive limousine, but a small competent roadster which solved the commuting problem satisfactorily. After dinner the three adults sat about the snapping wood fire in the living room, and their talk now was of work, of the people they knew, of Sally's magazine stories which were beginning to win a pleasant recognition. Also of Don's firm and the buildings they had designed and were planning.

"Have you been hurt yet by conditions, Don ?"

Donald looked older than Sally, Geoffrey thought, a well balanced vigorous man but with contemplative rather reticent eyes. His mouth, however, was the mouth of a man who knows happiness, firm yet ready to smile, sensitive, passionate, with a suggestion of tenderness and of humor. Geoff liked the way Don and Sally looked at each other, liked the respect Donald showed for his wife's work, the give and take which suggested that they were comrades no less than husband and wife. At his question the lines between Don's eyes deepened:

"Yes and no. That is, the firm has several big contracts on hand, but the outlook is growing curiously vague. Building has almost entirely stopped in and near New York, although we have things doing in the Middle West and have recently won a competition for a group of municipal buildings in Wyoming."

Sally left the room for a moment and Don continued: "Frankly, Geoff, there's not a business or professional man in the city who isn't as nervous as a horse that smells fire. We don't know what to-morrow may bring, money's tight, Wall Street's sick and suspicious. Perhaps the one thing that keeps us going is the memory that in 1914 they said the war and the money stringency couldn't last six months without financial ruin, and yet we're still on the map!"

"If you need capital, Don, I've got ten thousand I can let you have," said Geoffrey in a casual voice which yet had an undertone of concern.

Don laughed, touched his old friend's shoulder: "My dear chap, thanks! I'm all right to-day, and may be so to-morrow. But last year I persuaded the firm to expand, to enlarge our office. And now we face the possibility of having to discharge half the force. Which is sickening, you'll admit."

"It is," said Geoffrey. "I suppose this is where I

score—playing a lone hand, responsible for no women and children . . . and damnably envious of you lucky devils possessed of such blessings."

The two men looked at each other, and Donald said quietly: "Yes. I've played in luck. And yet—" he paused, smoked a ruminative pipe for a moment, and added: "We pay for all we get in this world Geoff. No joy comes as a free gift. Looking back I know that I wouldn't change one year of my life if I could! Yet there are times when any man with others dependent upon him is conscious of secret panic. If he fails what will happen to them? That question eats into your marrow, and especially in war time, when architecture is about as remunerative as scenery!"

Geoffrey nodded. The two men heard Sally speaking to a maid in the next room and Geoffrey laid a hand on his friend's arm.

"Yet Don, it's a big thing, to have made a woman as happy as that—to have preserved her youth, her faith in life, the very quality of her laugh!"

Donald smiled. For the moment his face was curiously happy. He said: "Oh, it's just Sally herself, nothing I've done!---"

Geoffrey stayed with them for several days, and he and Sally had some talks reminiscent of old times and young enthusiasms. Between them now was the bond between the man of experience and the happily married woman keenly interested in all the aspects of life.

He told her not merely of his recent work in France but of three years spent in England and on the Continent, years of hard steady work, and of many months in a mining camp to gather material for a series of articles, told her too of a curious experience in Mexico where with an army officer he had investigated some recently discovered remains of buried villages, a situation which the war in Mexico made difficult for the United States Government to handle.

As he talked, reconstructing his life for her benefit, telling her of his work, of his plans for the future—if the war left any future for a mere writing man—of the engrossing power of a long novel to possess a man's mind to the exclusion of almost every other interest, Sally wondered as to his personal relations. He wrote of women with insight and power, and she said finally:

"Geoff, in your books women count as they count in life. Yet you haven't mentioned a woman's name since you came, barring my own and Anne's. Tell me about your friendships, your love affairs, the might-have-beens and the still-possibles!"

"You're still an insatiable sentimentalist, Sally Dallam! And from that angle I'm wholly disappointing —really!"

Sally looked at him, her gray eyes smiling. "I'll believe that you have no matrimonial plans, just now. But that you've had no affairs in five long years—dear Geoff, don't strain my credulity."

He laughed, shrugged his shoulders, prodded a tiny shell with his boot. They were on a little pebbly beach, their backs to the house, their eyes on the far horizon while the wind whipped little waves into dancing white caps. The sun was warm, and they sat on a convenient log with that sense of utter privacy which only all outdoors gives one, facing earth and sea and sky, no human being within sight.

He began to speak, thoughtfully, with the frankness he had shown her since boyhood.

"I like women, Sally, and I know a great many. No writer of fiction can afford to disregard them. They stimulate a man's imagination, whet his curiosity, spur his ambition. But as one of them once said to me, 'By thirty-five all the most vital people are married'. Perhaps that's why so many of my friends are married women. That, and because they're safer, they understand men better, they demand less and give more."

"I suppose that's true," said Sally. "And yet-"

Geoffrey Kent picked out a smooth pebble, polished it in his hand.

"'And yet' your theory is that unmarried people should play together, that there's always a chance that they may combine," he said. "A few years back I held that view also: there was a woman I saw a great deal of the winter before I went to England, handsome. clever. original. I met her first in Boston, then her father was sent to Washington and for six months we were pretty constantly together. She was one of the most vivid creatures I've ever known—and she had one of the keenest minds."

"Then why," began Sally, but Kent laughed as he sent the shining pebble skimming through the water.

"My dear girl, that's exactly what we both thought why, or rather why not? Between us we developed a friendship; I may add that the other thing did not need developing, that indispensable element in an affair of the heart, passion. Frankly, I enjoyed her mind and felt her magnetism; the sum of the two ought to have been love. But I found, we both found, that it just wasn't! For some of us, especially after first youth, marrying is no longer simple, inevitable. So when I went abroad the thing ended. She was one of the women incapable of compromise."

Sally's eyes were eloquent. "But of course . .." Then she added: "Surely that describes you too, Geoffrey Kent."

He met her eyes, flushed under his coat of tan.

"Do you realize, Sally, that your own life is your dream come true? You two have been extraordinarily lucky! But remember that I'm unmarried, over forty and depressingly human!"

Somehow her silence drew him on . . .

"Which only means, dear, that my record is not as flawless as—Don's, for instance."

Still she did not speak, and suddenly Geoffrey felt contrite, half amused, and conscious of the irony of circumstance. He wanted her to understand.

"Sally, Don married at twenty-five, married the only girl he had cared for, the right girl! Don't you think people like you two can afford to be tolerant?—I mean of poor devils who have missed the vital thing."

"Don't you think," she parried, "that it's a mistake to assume that the happily married have escaped all temptations?"

Kent's gaze was straight and serious.

"I assume nothing of the sort. I suppose what you

call temptation may come to any normal man or woman, at almost any moment. Yet I believe even youth's hunger for emotion, experience, is less demoralizing than the slow march of years—when a man is lonely!"

He added, after a hesitant moment:

"After all, Sally, being decent when you've missed happiness is about the hardest thing there is!"

Who else had said that, almost the same words? Then she remembered; it had been Anne, long ago, And she said gently:

"Once I heard a woman say that. Yet though Life hasn't give her what she wanted she's gone on being— 'decent'. Perhaps it hasn't been easy, even for her."

"Of course it hasn't," said Geoffrey. "Yet you must realize Sally, that one or two experiences in a man's past don't necessarily spell that deadly thing, habit! A bad marriage weakens a man's work, but I believe habitual immorality poisons it! And when all's said, a man's job is the most vital thing in his life."

Her silence seemed to question this, but at last she said thoughtfully: "You may be right; Don might agree with you."

It was growing late and they turned from the blue Sound toward the house where the tea table was set, waiting their return. Sally laid her hand on his arm:

"Geoffrey, please don't think me a cramped little Pharisee, judging people, criticising their conduct—when Don and I have found it so easy to conform, having all the things we most wanted!"

"I think nothing of you that isn't... that you wouldn't like, Sally." He added, as the dogs bounded toward them, followed by Donny and Lola, "You two have been living for years in the cool shadow of the tree of life—incredibly happy! And I thank God for it!"

She looked at him strangely. For a long time life had been too full for introspection, analysis. Now that word "happy" flicked her consciousness with memories, with the old dread of to-morrows.

Then they were both submerged beneath a warm wave of youth, laughter, all the complicated business of vivid joyous living.

"SENTIMENTAL SALLY"

GEOFFREY had engagements to speak in New York, and later in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Milwaukee. But he expected to be back within a month and to see the Grahams in town, so the farewells were cheerful and casual. Yet after his brief visit the little household of three was conscious that his coming had altered things. Donald found himself thinking more and more of the world crisis and for the time dwelling less upon the approaching crisis in his office. He even asked himself whether in a year or so he and Geoffrey might not be actually in the army, although they were both over the usual draft age.

Sally also considered this possibility, in secret, but she was working hard on some fresh fiction and she found herself strangely unable to visualize any tragic outcome for America. Nevertheless when they went back to the New York apartment she crowded her already full program by eight hours a week of Red Cross work and began to read the papers, both local and foreign, with a new absorption. She knew that young Don was keenly absorbed in those same papers, that the boy was alive to world conditions as he had not been before the coming of Geoffrey. She paid his initiation fees in several relief societies and gave him permission to go to hear various public speakers returned from the front. But she also insisted that he work hard at school.

"For Donny, we can't tell when your chance to study may end. This war makes one feel that anything may happen, and in war times education often goes by the board. So I want you to work like mad while you can. The more you know the more you can help when you're needed. You must see that!"

Donny saw. He was growing so fast that Sally was 263

conscious of something almost like dismay, and the growth was as much mental as physical. But his high spirits, his splendid health and his affection for both Sally and his father reassured her. And later, when Geoffrey came back to New York for a few weeks, the life of the City seemed to have caught them all in its rhythmic cadence. He was much encouraged by his experience as a speaker for he had met with generous response, raised an extraordinary amount of money toward the equipping of a new hospital in Southern France, and come to realize that his own reputation as a war correspondent was far more widespread than he had supposed. The temperamental optimism of America influenced even Geoffrey, not to the point of minimizing the menace to civilization in his eyes, but rather convincing him that when the issues became more sharply defined his own country would not be wanting in either money or men.

So on a late November evening in that same year, 1915, two men and a woman dined at a famous restaurant not a stone's throw from Broadway, a restaurant whose decorations are reminiscent of Greece and Persia, but whose myriad and varying patrons suggest that strange blend called "pure Americans"—not by New Englanders or Virginians be it said—in reality a blend of Saxon, Celt, Pagan, Christian and Jew.

Sally, Donald, and their old friend sat at an upstairs table from which they could watch the dancing and at the same time preserve enough space and quiet to make conversation and companionship something more than sheer mockery. To-night they were three extremely happy people, and perhaps the knowledge that at any hour they might be called upon to pay a price for this happiness only accented it more strongly. It was Sally's birthday; that morning she had received an acceptance from a publisher of her first book, a collection of short stories, and even a modest cheque in payment of advance royalties.

The men drank to her success, standing, while the accommodating band played "Dixie", and Sally, flushed and laughing, flung her challenge at those smiling, sullen, "movie" artists whom we call the Fates. She waved her glass with a fine flourish:

"I should like to pin down Time, keep you two as you look this moment, watch the bead on my wine bubble on!"

There was something contagious about Sally Graham's joyousness, Kent told himself. Certainly with these old friends he was feeling more genuinely content than he had been in years. To-night by common consent they put aside all talk of the war. As Geoffrey phrased it, "I've told all I know, talked myself hoarse and dull and empty for weeks. So for a few hours I'd like to shelve tragedy and really play." "Do you remember that Christmas dinner nearly nine-

"Do you remember that Christmas dinner nearly nineteen years ago," said Sally, "when the world was a new toy and we were all sure we had it in our pocket? I remember the little Christmas trees and Anne's singing and your giving me your white rose, Geoff. Heavens, how incredibly young we were!"

The eyes of the two men met: they both recognized an astonishing fact, that this Sally was as radiant, as full of joyous optimism and of sheer delight in living as that rosy girl had been. Again Geoffrey was conscious of admiration for his friend. Somehow Donald had known how to retain in a mature woman the bright delicate joyousness usually characteristic of youth alone. Kent told himself that the secret lay in the fact that Sally Graham had never been disappointed in the people she loved best—at least the sorrows which had come to her had never been flavored with bitterness.

Later as she was dancing with her husband, dancing with a careless delight, as tall grasses sway in the wind, Don murmured:

"Sally, what is it? You look like a Fifth Avenue parade, with bands and banners!"

She nodded, gravely, but her eyes were gleaming.

"I feel guilty about it, Don, feeling so with the world at war, the future all uncertain. It's been a wonderful birthday—having you and Donny, getting over the book, seeing Geoff again. And I had a letter from Anne

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this afternoon; Anne and I have been friends just twenty-three years!"

She added, presently, "But then of course I know I'm exactly what Peter Gaunt always calls me—a silkstockinged sentimentalist!"

"You are," said Donald laughing, but his arm pressed her closer as they swept down the room of swaying figures and his eyes said things men's lips rarely phrase. He added aloud: "Yet being married to you goes on being an extraordinary adventure, Sally darling. I've been waiting for the dull moments—but they never come!"

When she danced again with Geoffrey, that world-wise person reminded himself rather grimly that many of the women he knew were given to lip rouge and thick powder, or to perpetual harping upon the servant question, to witty discussion of cheap scandal or to the use of cat claws. This freshness and mental vigor of two married people gave him a feeling of loss. Might not there be somewhere, for him, a woman with a brain and a heart, free to love him, to give him all that Sally gave Don? He was glad to be with them again, to know himself free of all disloyal desires or imaginings, capable of enjoying this bright comradeship which Sally the woman gave as fearlessly as the girl had given years ago.

Then, quite unaccountably, Geoffrey had one of those illogical premonitions that come even to the sanest of us out of nowhere. He stopped dancing in the middle of a bar of music, without a word of explanation.

Back at their own table Don said to Sally: "Tired, dear?"

"A little." What she did not say was that she had sensed in Geoffrey some curious anxiety, that had made him want to be with Donald again.

Kent was speaking to a waiter and, his order given, the three sat watching the dancers, the men smoking, drinking liqueurs, Sally listening to their quiet talk, her strong hands idle in her lap, her mind skimming along the surface of sheer depths—of war, how and when it would end—of her son's life, his education, how he would develop. She knew that he was bent upon getting to France, but even this failed to trouble her deeply since she was convinced that by Spring the war would be over.

At midnight they went home, walking down the Avenue; Don's car had been laid up for repairs, but they were glad to feel the crisp night air against their hot faces. They left Geoffrey at his hotel. He was to go in the morning. Her hand in his, Sally said: "You've been good for us, Geoff, you've waked us up. Don and I will be the better for having seen you—and please God when we meet again the war will be over and over right!"

The men shook hands, looking at each other as men do look when they are moved yet possess little of the verbal machinery for expressing emotion.

On the street Sally turned and waved her hand again to the tall soldierly figure in the doorway. Then she fell into step beside Don, and a few moments later their door closed behind them.

In her own room they looked at each other for an instant like lovers about to part.

"What is it," demanded Sally. "It's been a wonderful day and yet all the evening I've had a sense of suspense, of strain. Is it Geoffrey, the war as he sees it? Or something relating to you, or Donny? Why should I have this feeling?"

"What feeling, Sallykins?"

"That—all this . . . may be for the last time!"

"The Lord knows—I'm sure I don't," said Donald. But she was actually trembling, and he drew the long pins from her hat and took off her cloak.

"Sally, we've been married over seventeen years, and yet . . ." He broke off, held her close. After a little they were smiling at each other in the soft light of Sally's reading lamp, each studying the face of the other with the intensity of those to whom an absorbing love is still Life's most salient fact.

Sally said at last:

"And yet, Don, there's a college professor and psychologist, one of those dreadful, ignorant, educated people who know 'so many things that aren't so:"-Like Mark Twain's Adam. He informs his readers that 'all spontaneous passion dies out within the first five years of marriage,' or words to that effect. And Peter Gaunt—who's never married—actually thinks the man's an authority.''

Donald touched her white throat with his lips. "A lot they know-poor fools!"

A few days after Geoffrey's departure Anne was in town, on her way to a hospital in Southern France. She had taken a year's training in Washington, and this Anne, dedicated to a country and a cause she loved, was more vivid and eager than Sally had seen her in years, with something of the old girlish enthusiasm smoldering beneath the surface manner which still convinced very young girls and idle or sentimental men that Anne Dulaney was "dreadfully cynical."

In Anne's room the two women talked late that first night in the fashion of their girlhood. Sally wanted to know all about the doctor, about Jim, for Jim as a correspondent with his family was a failure, about the old Washington set whom she saw all too infrequently now.

"Dad's like an old war horse hearing the guns thunder," said Anne. "He's so interested in the war, so eager to serve in some way that he looks ten years younger. But the work at home is piling up: some of the best of the younger physicans and surgeons have gone already. So Dad's terribly important. Jim talks of going across, but his practise has grown and he is so indispensable at the hospital that I don't see how he can leave unless we get in and it's absolutely necessary."

Sally said quietly: "Anne, is that situation unchanged ?"

"You mean is Jim still my best friend and am I still idiotically in love with him?"

"If you choose to put it that way."

Anne looked at the Metropolitan Tower as the red and white flashes recorded midnight. She did not change color or look irritated in the old Anne fashion, but merely contemplated Sally thoughtfully.

"Time alters everything, Sara. I know Jim in a

different way—know why he has never thought of being in love with me—no, I can't tell you about it. Jim may, in some expansive mood. And all during this last year I've worked so hard at the hospital that I haven't had time to think of him or myself. Oh, yes, I've seen him, but professionally, impersonally. None of the old long talks in the library at home, when I used to play to him, sing him sentimental songs, and go through secret tortures of fear that he might guess my secret."

She paused, braided her long hair with skilful fingers, and added quietly:

"What I feel for Jim now is deep and still and a little gray—like Life!"

"Anne, I can't bear you to feel so—all the sparkle gone!"

Anne smiled. "Why not, when Life is gray—not champagne but rather muddy water, to most people over thirty. Your experience isn't 'the common lot', my dear. Jim calls you 'the fairy-tale pair'!"

"But why, Anne? When there are millions of happy marriages?"

"If that is true the millions conceal their bliss successfully! Jim sees mighty little of it, I know that. He said to me once: "We doctors are glad now and then to find courageous people, contented people. We don't expect our patients to be happy—except children, healthy well-cared-for children'."

"Yet his father and mother have had years of happiness," said Sally almost indignantly.

"Yes, Jim might agree that they also are exceptional," said Anne. "But their day is declining, Sally. The Senator isn't far from seventy and his blood pressure is much too high."

"But they've had it," cried Sally, "work and companionship and love, just what Don and I have. And Marion and Jerry—they've had bad times but they have fought through. Sooner or later I believe most people touch real joy, that almost all those who are tragic or ill or old have had a taste, a glimpse, anyway. If I didn't believe that I shouldn't want to go on living!"

Anne smiled, rather a lonesome little smile. "Does

it ever occur to you, Sally, how many people wish they didn't have to go on-want to stop and just can't?"

Sally was silent. Before she left for the night she took Anne in her arms.

"Darling, I'd give you a year of my happiness—if I could!"

Anne laughed, but there were tears in her eyes. "I believe you'd be that reckless, my sentimental Sally! Luckily there are some things which can't be given away."

Sally went to her own room, and then came back for an instant, sat on Anne's bed in her long blue dressing gown, cheeks scarlet, eyes gleaming.

"Anne," she said, "some people get their great moments in youth, some later, some even in their old age. It's like writing stories. Peter Gaunt and I still fight about 'the happy ending.' He hates it; I tell him that it's all where you decide to stop. You may end a story on a high note—when the bells are ringing and the sun is shining. And you may wait until the tests of life come—show your hero or heroine after the end, as it were. So I'm wondering whether twenty years later you and I may not see life whole—each of us having known good and evil."

Anne looked at this friend of hers, for the moment grave, introspective, and cried with fierce inconsistency:

"Sally Dallam, go to bed. I don't want you to 'see whole life.' I want you to believe in happiness, always, just as you do now. How could any of us go to France —to that land of nightmare—if it weren't for knowing a few Sallies and Dons at home!"

CHAPTER III

CHANGE

JUST when life began to change and mysteriously deepen Sally never knew. More and more the war altered the aspects of every situation, every question, and during the late winter and early spring of 1916 architects and contractors began to see that building was practically at a standstill. Old established firms were forced to discharge many of their best men, while other firms kept on their course with an official air of things doing although the heads knew that this appearance of prosperity was achieved by paying salaries from a sinking fund which must soon be exhausted, if the war went on too long.

Donald was senior partner in the firm of Graham, Rankin and Rudd, and, as he had told Geoffrey, was responsible for considerable business expansion two years earlier. Now this expansion added to their liabilities and the few important contracts and recently obtained commissions, which kept the office force busy, merely accented the absence of new business.

One night Donald came home haggard, looking almost ill. A promising young architect who had been in the office until a year earlier, when he had started out for himself, Arnold Grieve by name, had been visibly affected by the general depression. Donald had seen him the day before. They had discussed the situation, and Don had been troubled by the younger man's gray face and burning eyes.

Grieve had said: "I don't see my way out; yet for the first time in my life I don't care even about my work." To which Donald had promptly responded by the offer of a small loan, a thousand dollars. Grieve had refused. He had seemed to be worrying about his three motherless children, had spoken of the responsibility they entailed, seeming obsessed with fear concerning their well-being. Yet when Donald still pressed the question of a loan he had said:

"No, Mr. Graham. I don't need it, yet. And I hope to pull through without borrowing from any one."

He had left Don's office apparently in a more cheerful mood, but that night he had taken an over-dose of some sort of sedative, and had been found in the morning by his twelve-year-old son, dead.

Donald, telling the simple bald facts to Sally—it seemed that Grieve had left an ample insurance and that the children would be provided for and looked after by a devoted young aunt—blamed himself for not having understood the extent of the man's depression. "If I had insisted upon giving him the money, gone home with him or taken him to a specialist, the thing might not have happened."

Sally put her hand on his arm. Her eyes were dimmed, but she said sharply; "Nonsense, Don. You aren't a doctor or a mind reader. Blaming yourself is morbid, absurd."

Jerry and Marion reiterated this verdict but Don had been sleeping badly for weeks so the three finally persuaded him to go down for a few days of rest to the cottage on the shore. Sally took one maid, leaving Donny in the apartment with the capable and motherly cook. At the time the boy was taking a series of examinations so that his school work could not be interrupted.

Once back in the sunny house with its view of shining water and trackless wastes of sky Sally rejoiced in their decision. The glowing open fires, the absolute quiet, their happy solitude together, all these seemed to rest Donald, speedily to bring him nearer the level of the sane optimism characteristic of the man. They had come without the car, and went for long tramps along the beach or took a canoe and spent hours paddling on water almost as smooth as that inland lake they both recalled so vividly. The weather remained mild and spring-like, more like May than March, but in the evenings they sat beside crackling fires and Sally read aloud, no newspapers or magazines with war material, but old favorites like Henry Esmond and Vanity Fair, or bits of verse—Marlowe, Spenser, Shakspere's sonnets—or from the thin green volumes of Le Morte d'Arthur which Sally rummaged for in a little ancient cowhide trunk. Metamorphosed by a rug and some cushions, this trunk had long served as a window seat in her room, and Don asked curiously:

"Sally, what else have you got hidden in that trunk? You've always had it and I've never seen the inside yet."

She laughed, locked it carefully, took his arm and piloted him back to the fire.

"'Hidden treasure, old curiosity. But treasure that wouldn't interest you in the least. And that trunk saw me through boarding school—belonged to my mother before me."

Don settled back in his chair, watched his wife lazily, enjoying the rhythm of her swift movements, the light on her burnished brown hair, the look of poise and power which vividly recalled Honor Dallam.

After a while they came back to a favorite volume of Kipling. When she had ceased reading her beloved "Brushwood Boy" Don looked up:

"We had that on our honeymoon, Sally, that and 'The Maltese Cat' and 'Without Benefit of Clergy.' After all these years it's curious how fresh they are—how the charm of a story holds, when it's good enough."

He added after a little pause: "Keep at the writing game, Sally. That last tale of yours was the best yet: Gaunt says you have great possibilities, but that you're much more ambitious for me and my son than you are for the reputation of Sara Hull Dallam."

She crossed the space between them and sat on the arm of his chair. "Where did you see Peter, Don? I didn't know you'd ever met, except the few times I've enticed him to the apartment."

He laughed. "Can't I have my small secrets, you with your mysterious trunk that you lock up like a Bluebeard's closet!"

She wheedled: "Where did you see Peter. Dondarling? Please."

He shrugged, laid her hand against his cheek. "If you

must know, in a prosy hotel basement, patronizing the same barber! It seems our offices are not three blocks apart. At the time he gave me messages for you, which of course I forgot. But he seems to labor under the impression that it's my duty as a husband to see that you produce masterpieces. I feel guilty letting you play nurse and companion now, instead of getting out fresh copy."

Sally's chin went up, her eyes glowed. "Peter doesn't understand, Don. Nobody understands—who doesn't care more for another person than for anything belonging only to one's self. Yet sometimes I wish I *did* care more for these yarns that spin themselves in my head and less for you—and Donny!"

They sat very still, very close, the firelight playing over their faces, while outside the wind was rising. At last Don said:

"Husbands are dull cattle, Sally. But I'd like you to know one thing, never to forget it."

"What, dearest ?"

"That you're a wonderful wife! That you've been wonderful for nearly eighteen years. Sometimes when I see men like Peter Gaunt and Geoffrey and our own Jim, splendid fellows and lonesome as Hell, I feel ashamed! It's like being a multi-millionaire forced to look upon a starving mob, unable to fling them even a crust. And it's all—you!"

She leaned down from his knee to poke the fire into a yet brighter glow, then turned back to him and in the old wordless fashion laid her cheek against his. For a long time they sat silent; at last she said: "Thank you, Don," in a voice like a line of singing verse. She added: "In spite of Anne we aren't the only ones. Look at Lois and her painter, at your father and mother,—Oh there are thousands, everywhere—who have known what we know—love and children and firelight."

As she spoke the rays of a red sunset penetrated the room and they ran to the window to look. The afterglow had turned the sky to opal fire and the water gleamed and sparkled until sky and sea seemed one ineffable glory. War—surely war was an evil dream. Back in the city once more things went along quietly for weeks. Young Don passed his examinations with flying colors, poets were writing delirious verse about the glorious triumphs of the Russian Revolution, England was gamely fighting the menace of sea-devils spawned on the Baltic, and Geoffrey Kent's letters from the Front were kindling even prosaic and unimaginative mid-westerners to an enthusiasm as vivid as their former indifference had been stagnant. Sally read these letters with a queer mixture of pride and pain.

Yet in New York the long strain was telling horribly. Down in the offices on lower Broadway, on Wall Street, a curious pall seemed to hang like low-lying clouds all day long. Men responsible for the policies of "big business" were haunted by the thought of widows and orphans beggared not by any fault of theirs, but by a market gone mad, men steeped in the atmosphere of success faced for the first time the possibility of failure, men who had never fought bombs and gas and devastating flame fought the black devils of depression and fear that roamed through the city, through the country, through the world, unchecked, subtly coloring thought by day and dreams by night.

On Don's sixteenth birthday he went to see Barrie's "Cinderella" with his father and mother, and for a few brief hours the wizardry of a master caught the audience away from the world obsession of gloom and fear into a clean bright realm of fancy. As they came out of the theater the two Dons looked curiously alike; usually the boy resembled his grandmother rather than his father, but to-night their faces wore the same expression of vivid alertness as though the play had roused some dormant faculty for self-expression. It was Donny who said, with that tiny tremor of his chin so characteristic of his father also when strongly moved:

"Gee, Mother, Barrie can turn a fellow into a regular sob-sister! I saw you crying and it was all I could do not to follow suit. And Dad looks wobbly yet."

Don laughed, his eyes gleaming behind his glasses. "Barrie has a way with him," was all he said, but Sally was satisfied with the effect of her "party." "Dad," said Donny, "who did Cinderella remind you of, in the scene where she looks over the babies, tucking them in all comfy like a little girl with her dolls?"

They were walking down Broadway, Sally in the middle, and her husband merely laughed.

"I don't know," began Sally, and then flushed at the glance her two menfolk exchanged.

"The way she mothers everything in sight," said the boy teasingly, "the babies and the cop, bullies them all for their own good. Kind of makes you want to hug her, right on the stage," whereupon young Don's arm went about Sally's shoulders for an instant in a grip that hurt. His lordly disregard of the crowd was a new phase. For a year or two he had been possessed by youth's self-conscious fear of being conspicuous, but this appeared to be a by-gone epoch in his rapid development.

At that boyish grip Sally was conscious of a shiver of pure joy. Yet it was absurd for a woman in sight of the prosaic forties to feel, not indeed like the Cinderella on the stage but rather like the little girl she had once been, in the boat with Jim and Don, filled with the pride of belonging in a live fairy tale. As they passed the Herald Building they paused to read the war news, and that sobered her.

This is not a war story, so it does not matter what the headlines said that night. Yet all the reactions of the great struggle, all the tragedies and intimate pitiful histories of that time are not related in print, never will be so related. And Sally's story cannot be told without touching on that great world drama, in another generation to seem like an evil dream.

A week later she went to see Peter Gaunt. He was no longer a magazine editor but one of the readers and advisers in a successful publishing house. It was his firm which had brought out Sally's book, although Peter had no particular enthusiasm about it or about the short stories she was still selling to the magazines. He took great interest in her work, but always more in its possibilities than in any actual achievement; in short Peter Gaunt was Sally's most pungent and insatiable critic. To-day she had come to discuss with him a plan for a little novel which had been taking shape in the back of her mind. He listened attentively, showing a real respect for her creative faculty, her imaginative power, yet her angle of vision and personal viewpoint irritated him. But to-day in the middle of a diatribe upon her insufferable optimism he looked at her with eyes suddenly keen and very kind.

"Is there anything wrong, dear child! You look fagged, as though you'd been sleeping badly."

To her disgust two tears which had been just back of her eyelids rolled down upon her cheeks. She attacked them savagely with her handkerchief, saying:

"It's my husband who has been sleeping badly, Peter Gaunt. And I don't know why. War and worry, I suppose: he's so white and tense and quiet that he frightens me. Yet he will go to the office and drive the car and act exactly as though nothing were wrong. I'm uneasy every minute."

She told him of the young architect's death, the situation in Donald's office, and about the happy week at the shore a month ago which for a time had seemed a cure.

"Strain—the inevitable nervous reaction of this war," said Peter. "Business men are everywhere on the ragged edge of neurasthenia, because we who can't fight, who can only work and watch that seething mass over there are feeling the effects the more viciously. Get Graham to stop using his car and walk to his office—even a mile or so morning and night will help. And if he won't see a doctor why don't you get his brother in Washington to run up and look him, over?"

The thought of Jim was vaguely comforting. Sally said that that was a good suggestion upon which she would act at once.

"You see, when I've asked Don to go to a doctor he's told me I 'mustn't nag', and Peter, you know I don't nag, and I almost never worry. But he's not himself.

Gaunt laid a thin hand on her sleeve. "You poor girl! I know by my own experience that sleeplessness plays Hell with tempers and nerves. You'd better put the thing up to Dr. Jim. He will have double authority." Sally wrote her letter that afternoon and mailed it with a special stamp. She talked to Lois Marlin over the telephone and Lois was sympathetic if not reassuring. All the men were beginning to break; if we didn't get into the war soon many of them would be quite mad, at least Ben would. He had stopped painting, spent his time reading every paper and magazine which touched upon the world situation, and every now and then he stopped sleeping too.

The next three days were a puzzling maze of anxiety and dull pain. Sally did not hear from Jim even when she telegraphed. Afterward it appeared that he had gone South with a very ill patient and been absent from Washington almost a week so that her letter reached him five days late. Meanwhile Donald persisted in driving his car, going every morning to the office, opposing all her suggestions that he should rest, see a physician, openly recognize and fight the devil harassing him. She could find no adequate cause for his depression; at the office there seemed to be no immediate crisis and Donald's partners were cheerful and insistent that the firm could hold out as long as the German Empire. But Don, while he quoted his partners and told Sally that nothing in the world was the matter with him. altered visibly under her eves. From her strong cheerful Donald he was being metamorphosed into a grim silent man whom one would hardly have recognized.

Jim and Marion were out of town, Donny had finished his examinations and gone for a visit to his grandparents at the old place, and in a city which a little while before had seemed so friendly and homelike Sally Graham was finding herself amazingly lonely. Finally she went to see a nerve specialist whom Donald would not consult, told him the situation and got some counsel and a sedative, which later Don refused to take. But after a particularly hopeless night—he had not slept an hour there came a morning when he agreed not to go to the office. Instead they went to the park, leaving the city streets to wander through little by-paths, children playing about, squirrels scuttling up and down the tree

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trunks. Don was quiet, curiously passive, but he smiled at her reassuringly and clasped her hand so that presently they were walking like two children with only squirrels and children for audience.

"You mustn't worry, Sally. I've been a well man all my life and I suppose a little insomnia and general misery are about due."

It was a mild day, the air soft and fresh, and they sat down on a bench and presently a child passed, lingering behind two older girls, looking at Sally with wide-open blue eyes. Sally smiled at the baby, her eyes wet with those unaccountable tears she had been fighting for days, and the atom stopped still, stared at her. She was a tiny girl, perhaps three years old, and she reminded Sally of her own mother, for about the little person there was already something radiant, reassuring. She put a fat baby hand on Sally's blue frock, smoothed it, saying in a clear little voice:

"Poor yady, po-or, po-or!"

The older children, severely correct young things in the early teens, turned and beheld the baby speaking to strangers. There were quick protests, the tiny girl was borne off, and Sally felt a warm sense of gratitude and regret.

"Wasn't she a darling, Don? She looked as our little Honor might have looked!"

She realized that he had not heard her, had not noticed the child. He seemed to be staring at nothing, his face impassive, and she cried sharply: "Don!"

She spoke his name again, her hand on his arm, and this time he responded, turning toward her: "What? What is it?"

"Are you ill? Dear, what is it?"

"I must have gone off for a moment-slept, at last!"

Of course that was it, nothing to worry one. Sally felt that she too was fast developing nerves. But though she got him to bed early that evening he lay wide-eyed and patient through the night. Yet in the morning he insisted that he was better, that he could endure no more inaction and was moreover needed at the office. She asked him not to take out the car. "Walk to the office, dear, and I'll go with you."

He agreed to this, seemed refreshed by his coffee and ate more breakfast than he had eaten for some time. When she left him at the office building she had a feeling of reassurance. After all what on earth was she afraid of? He might be exhausted but he was perfectly sane, and the depression over-shadowing him was a cloud hanging black and grim over the whole world. She told herself that Geoffrey and Peter Gaunt were right, she was spoiled, all these years she had known nothing but sparkling sunshine. When the weather changed she did not know how to face the resultant gloom.

In the afternoon she telephoned to the office to find out that Don had sent for his car and driven out to Larchmont on business. She asked the stenographer:

"How did Mr. Graham seem, Miss Silver? He's been having bad nights and I'm worried."

Miss Silver, a competent woman of fifty with the look of a prim New England spinster, possessed one contradictory characteristic, a mellow sympathetic voice. She said quickly: "So have I, Mrs. Graham. He hasn't been himself for some time, but I've laid it up to war and worry."

Sally felt vaguely reassured by that kind and pleasant voice. After all it wasn't just Don. Everything was wrong.

He did not get home for dinner; at ten o'clock he still had not come and Sally sent her maids to bed, and by eleven o'clock was pacing the floor, white with the fear she could no longer control. For suddenly she *knew* that her anxiety was no mere imagining, that something final and dreadful was happening. When at midnight the telephone rang she was braced to the inevitable. She heard a tired voice, the voice of a blasé hospital official:

"Is this Mrs. Graham, Mrs. Donald Graham? Your husband has had an accident. His car collided with a motor truck, and he is here at the hospital. No, he is still alive. This is the General Hospital. Come to WARD E, ground floor."

CHAPTER IV

THE END OF JOY

N the grimmest ward of the great grim hospital he looked at her with strange eyes, and she knew that the end had come, the end of youth and joy, of their life together. His arms and head were bandaged, under the bed clothes his body lay limp and still save for a nervous twitching now and then which seemed to endanger all those unseen bandages. In a low voice the nurse had told her the bald facts, a quiet man nurse with understanding in his plain strong face. Mr. Graham's car had collided with a huge van, the fault had seemed with the driver of the car. no one understood the cause of the collision. The policeman had supposed—well, officers were sometimes stupid and they had brought him here. No, there was no hope. He had lost too much blood before reaching the hospital. Many contusions were due to the fact that he had been flung from the car against an iron pillar, had been cut by the glass of the wind shield, and if he lived the chances were that he would be hopelessly crippled.

Sally knelt by the narrow iron bed. A screen shut them away from the prying eyes of men in the ward, men moving about, curious concerning this tragedy beyond their own experience, men for the most part with bloated faces and pouches under the eyes. Sally knew that they were there, then forgot them, saw and heard only Don's still pallor, his painful breathing, found herself praying that he might die quickly, that he might not suffer. To have him live on, maimed, helpless, that would be unendurable anguish.

She could not take his hand for both were bandaged, but she slipped her own under the collar of the hospital shirt and touched his shoulder, still smooth and warm. It seemed hours before either of them moved or spoke Only the gray eyes, mysteriously dimmed and vei and without the familiar glasses, looked at her as tently as though he were photographing her face up some sensitized plate of the spirit.

At last he said in his own calm voice:

"It was my fault, dear. I should have minded you left the car alone."

"It was mine—you were too tired; I ought to hav kept you in bed, taken care of you."

His old faint smile, whimsical, tender, hovered over the hurt lips. "You couldn't—damned obstinacy—I think it was like . . . in the park . . ."

His meaning clutched her fired mind. "You mean you fell asleep that way, driving?" The tiny movement of his chin meant "yes." After

The tiny movement of his chin meant "yes." After a little he said: "Lucky it was only—me. Might have run down a woman—or a child."

Her fingers pressed his shoulder. For a long time they were very still, save for that occasional dreadful twitching of his body. Then he spoke again.

"It's not so bad, Sally. Things at the office . . . the war . . . I've blundered badly. This . . . simplifies everything."

"Don, Don, you don't want to go, to leave me!"

It was her sole protest, the only one she ever uttered. Donald's eyes changed, became strangely eloquent, full of light.

"Not that, my . . . wife-never that . . ."

In the long moments that passed, drifting into hours, she was conscious of many things, seemed to see life as she had never seen it before, the piteousness of it, the delicate promise, the ironic accidents, the inevitable anguish, not her own merely, but the life of her kind . . . She felt that smooth shoulder under her hand, felt the life still beating on, yet more slowly, felt the presence of their great enveloping love and of her own utter helplessness. Now and then she heard voices, the screen was moved, a doctor, kind and young, came, did things, went away. Once she heard him say to some one else: "He should never have been brought to this ward—a fool blunder." Or the nurse was speaking to Don in a voice strangely gentle, called him "Boy," touching him with exquisite care.

All the while there was about her husband a characteristic quiet, even now she knew he was remembering her, controlling the querulousness of pain deadened by the drugs they had given him but changed into a dreadful restlessness. They sent her away while they injected morphine again. When she came back he seemed asleep, but the touch of her hand brought a faint quiver across his face, a look not quite a smile which said more eloquently than any words that though the spirit was almost through with the tortured body consciousness still endured—consciousness of her.

Later his eyes opened, recognition in them.

"Don darling, have you been happy?"

For one instant she saw the old gay gleam, then there came a long look.

"So happy ... shining years, with you ... and the boy"—then the gleam faded utterly, the face was gray, she heard a last low murmur, "so happy, until ..."

He did not speak again, and she sat for a long time, that little word beating against her heart. If he had just gone *happy*, remembering only the beauty of their life, but she knew that the brooding shadow hovering over him for those few strange weeks was still there, even at the end it did not lift.

He went at last, quietly, simply ceased to breathe. Afterward she found herself in the street, pearly dawn breaking over the city, her hand tightly clasped by another hand which seemed to understand. It belonged to Lois Marlin, who said, as they stood on the steps of the great dreary hospital:

"I'll call a taxi, dear."

"Couldn't we walk," said Sally.

Without comment or protest Lois held her hand a little more tightly and they started. Again Sally was conscious as she had been all night that she was two people, one drifting along beneath the hurtling elevated trains, a maimed thing tortured into a sort of dreadful immobility. The other self looked down from vast heights upon those pygmy figures, Lois Marlin and Sally Graham, upon the dingy street, the thundering trains, the distorted war-mad world, recording everything that occurred, calm, dispassionate, impersonal, curiously alien to all emotion.

So long as she lived she was to remember that walk, the March wind against her face, sharply fresh, the clanging of an ambulance that rushed past them, the dense gray shadows which seemed to envelop everything, and always that hand gripping hers, strong, kind, understanding as might have been the hand of some grave and tender god.

She was conscious of a strange relief amid all the shadows, a sort of gratitude to unknown unseen powers. Don had suffered for days, she had not known why, she did not understand now, but he was suddenly safe from all the shifting tragedies and surprises that make life what it is. Pain, sorrow, fear, this incredible war which haunted you night and day, all the responsibility which Donald and his kind feel deeply, although he had carried his with such a buoyant and gallant air, none of these could ever touch him again. There came a sudden exaltation in another thought. She said aloud:

"He will never have to endure a thing like this pain like mine. Lois, I am so glad!"

Lois only held her hand the tighter. Dimly Sally knew that not Anne herself, not Honor Dallam who had soothed a child's grief long ago, could have been more wonderful than this tall silent woman. And she was dreamily conscious that her friend's face was beautiful, the delicate profile, even her strange pallor. That was it, the thing that made even Death bearable, beauty, not merely of the body but of the gallant soul. She remembered an impression which had come to her in that dreadful ward, a consciousness of the dignity of Donald's dying, of the reverence of those two men, the nurse and the doctor, for a spirit so gallant, so quietly beautiful at a time when quietness and beauty are so often shattered by blind terror or barren regret. There, in the noisy street on that first morning of

her new life in an altered world, Sally Graham clung to that firm hand and to a consciousness deep in her tortured mind, the consciousness that bodies die but beauty lives, deathless, untarnished by mortal anguish, nexplicable, yet somehow indestructible.

CHAPTER V

SALLY AND THE DOCTOR

L ATE that same night her son held her in his arms, his smooth boyish cheek pressed to hers:

"Mother—oh, Mother darling, we've got each other left. I'll try to make up, to take his place, to be a man...oh, my own Dad!"

In the sudden passion of his grief she found herself very quiet. He must be comforted, she must not let his pain cut too deep, after all he was such a child. And Jim arriving at last, taking all responsibility and care of details from her shoulders, was yet so sickened by grief and shock that Sally's instinct was to mother him During those strange days she was conscious of too. many people, of faces, flowers, letters, the sympathy and love which yet seemed curiously remote. There remained afterward certain pictures printed on her mental retina, fragments of talk. One of these memories was of Jim and herself alone in the library which had been Don's special sanctum. Jim sat in his brother's high-backed arm-chair, his finely molded dark head outlined against a picture on the opposite wall, a luminous landscape by Marlin which Don had particularly liked and bought at an Academy exhibition. It was a bit of golden Autumn: against its warm and vivid beauty Jim's profile was sharply drawn, pallid as marble. He leaned forward, took her hand:

"Sally, since Mother is ill and Father unable to come I feel doubly responsible for you. And I want you always to remember one thing."

Sally's lids were heavy to lift, but she contrived a shadowy little smile with her lips.

"What is it, Jim dear?"

"Only that we need you, Sally, the whole bunch of us, not merely the boy—need your love to help us bear this thing, and your dumb grit! It's hardest for you—your life is torn to shreds. Just the same Mother, Marion, all of us are leaning on you, depending on your strength, your courage!"

Even at that moment she had a realizing sense of the quality of this brother of Don's. Deep in her there had been a conviction that the real Sally Graham had died that morning in the hospital, the Sally Don had loved, glowingly alive, full of ambition and belief in the dignity and integrity of human life. All that was left was the shell of a woman, the outer visible tangible self... No wonder Anne cared for this surgeon whose personality seemed given to his work yet who understood women as few men understand and who struck the keynote of her crying need,—to feel of value still in a world grown empty.

She looked at him for a moment dumbly, meeting those beautiful dark eyes, so like Aunt Laura's eyes, yet also in their expression reminding her of . . .

also in their expression reminding her of . . . She said at last, "Thank you, dear," and added, "You're very like him sometimes, Jimsy!"

Jim got up and went to the window and stood with his back to her, gazing into the misty void of the city, at the tall buildings faintly outlined against a vast silver cloud. He was seeing nothing but the wide tearless gray eyes of the little girl whom he and Don had teased and played with long ago. And he said under his breath: "My God, how I wish Anne were here! It's Anne she needs."

Yet in a sense he was wrong. During those first strange unreal days and weeks Sally needed nobody, not even Anne. What she needed most only time could bring, and this was a restored sense of values, a realization that even the blackest calamity cannot utterly destroy the fabric of a lifetime. For weeks, months, the day in the hospital and that little word of Don's at the last seemed to blot out all the radiant years they had known together . . .

Day and night that altered Donald was before her, the man not merely physically maimed but changed in spirit, all his gay courage, his whimsical tenderness, his zest and joy in life mysteriously vanished. There had been left only his indestructible personal dignity, the beauty of his nature which neither life nor death could alter... If he had gone happy, if he had been killed in battle, or had died naturally before that brief period of inexplicable depression, then she would have suffered, but only for herself and for those others who had lost him. Now she was suffering for and with him, and her consciousness of this was a thing she could not explain even to Jim or young Don or Lois, for it was the inevitable reaction of that change in him which nobody had seen save herself.

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Outwardly she lived a normal life, did things that had to be done, saw people who must be seen, wrote and wrote until at times the world seemed full of the letters one received and answered and of the torment of explaining the inexplicable. The facts in the case were so simple, but the inferences, the effort to analyze cause and effect, to explain just why Donald had been allowed to drive his car when he should have been in bed, why his nervous vitality had suddenly failed, why the war had affected his spirits more than those of other men in a far worse financial position—in some subtle way it was these questions Sally found herself trying to answer to others, and especially to herself.

About this time Dr. Dulaney came to New York for a few days, and his understanding quietness and the things he said, casually, with no effect of saying them for a purpose, seemed to give her a clutch upon her slipping will.

Anne's father looked older, thinner, than Sally had ever seen him, yet in body and mind he seemed hard and vigorous. Actually he must have been seventy but there was about him none of the relaxation and resignation which we often associate with age; the doctor was alive as the most eager youth to the need of the world in that hour, and his whole aspect now, the quality of his sympathy, gave Sally a feeling that once he had lived through such anguish even as her own.

One of the first things he said to her was:

"It's unbelievable, what we can endure, come through,

even recover from! Yet I have no religious consolations to offer you, child . . . such as your mother might have given."

He paused; they were standing by the study window, looking into that same vista which Jim had faced without seeing, but the old man's keen eyes missed no spring of the tall towers even while his mind was traveling the deep rut of the past.

Sally's hand slipped into his. That mention of her mother was like opening a window in a dark wall. After long years the personality of Honor Dallam returned to her child in the deep sweetness of the doctor's voice. He went on, slowly:

"But I can tell you that if we just have grit—if we hang on, desperately, in time Life heals the scars she makes. Over thirty years ago Anne's mother died, died a terrible death. It was the scourge which we doctors have not yet conquered, which even to-day we do not understand, and cannot control. And yet her death seemed so needless, it seemed, Sally, as though my ignorance had killed her, as though I, and other men, by not giving all our energy and mental acuteness to solving that one problem had somehow destroyed her. For she was so young—as with your Don all life seemed still ahead—all her finest victories and joys still to attain."

Again he paused, gazing into the chasm of the city and at those dream palaces silhouetted against a luminous sky.

"Even with the child—Anne was hardly more than a baby then—those first years after her going were plain *HeW!* I had my profession, the demands upon my skill and patience, the need to forget myself. Yet for a time all sympathy seemed dead in me—I had no emotion left! But I went on with my practise, automatically at first, and that incessant work counted. Only there were still hours in the night when no routine and no intellectual problems could help—it is in such hours that memory claws at our hearts like a wild beast!"

Sally shivered and he went on swiftly: "I know, child! Yet just as I lived through that time so, please God, a day will come when your boy and your work and beyond all your own courage shall build for you a life new, worth living."

"Yet it looks so endless," said Sally. "Just the other day Donald and I were talking about middle age, what one gained when youth was definitely passed, but now, looking ahead, I feel so horribly young, capable of living on and on. My mother's mother lived to be eighty, and I'm so strong."

The old man put an arm around her.

"I know, Sally! When Maggy died I was thirtynine. Now I'm seventy-three. Yet one's feet do keep in the trail, somehow. And after a while, despite the barrenness, the desolation, one sees new shoots, wild flowers . . for me came first pleasure in Anne, then there was your mother, for a few years before you married I had all three of you. Those years were happy. How much your mother meant to me even she never dreamed. Now comes this war: it seems to have swallowed up Anne, but it has also taken away many physicans and surgeons and crammed my life with work, given me the feeling of being vitally needed. After all that's the tonic we all must have, doctors, clergymen, men and women!"

Sally could not speak and Dulaney held her closely:

"This is the hard stretch, dear! Fight through this year, with your mother's splendid pluck—and you'll be able to write again. The very devils in Hell could bear up if each had his own job—and if your Kipling didn't write a poem about that he should have!"

"But it was Don's work I cared most for," said Sally slowly. "There's a little theater he built, last year—it's off Broadway—such a simple quiet building. But it's right, beautiful. He loved it—they gave him a free hand inside and out. And there's a tall apartment house on Park Avenue, like a crag against the sky. Nothing I ever wrote counts as those things of his count!"

Dulancy smiled, a smile twisted, tender.

"In spite of all Honor Dallam's training there's a primitive strain in you. Sally! Yet I've come to see that she was right—women need work of their own, work that grips their minds. Even this suffrage nonsense, which an old conservative like myself hates, cannot alter that fact. Anne's singing and practising the professional work I opposed at first—her life would have been empty without it. Even a prejudiced old man can see that. And yet of course there's one thing all women need more still—their own babies! That's the fundamental, universal need!"—

Even now Sally could dimly wonder whether the doctor understood just why Anne had not married. But whatever he knew or divined he refrained from further talk concerning Anne, beyond betraying the fact that he was consumed with envy of her.

"The young things who actually get over theremere petticoats, beardless schoolboys-God! How we old fellows envy them!"

Sally had a leaping understanding of that desire. If it were not for the boy how gladly she would have gone.

When Dulaney went back to Washington he left in Sally's mind a consciousness that of all her friends he alone had really endured and lived down a grief as great as her own, moreover that he had developed in character and had effectively worked, without any appearance of that dreadful patience which to Sally seemed worse than any rebellion, any anguish.

And as Anne had been left to the doctor, so she had her boy. If she lay sleepless during long dreary nights, if that haunting memory of Donald's altered personality and inexplicable suffering was always in the back of her mind, at least she was conscious of a hushed gratitude to "whatever gods there be" for the gallant life still left. She had the boy, and at this stage Donny gave every symptom of dependence upon this mother of his.

CHAPTER VI

THE PATH OF GLORY

S nothing succeeds like success, so nothing attracts grief so inevitably as past sorrow. Until this break the whole Graham tribe had prospered. True. there had been that incident in the lives of Marion and Jerry at the time of Sally's marriage to Donald, but that had been lived down long since, the anguish and humiliation of both husband and wife. Then the Senator had lost a good deal of money in unfortunate investments, and this fact had thrown more responsibility upon both of his sons, had necessitated an unwonted economy for the old people after years of prosperous Of late years the Senator himself had been living. less robust, and the duty of seeing that he did not overtax his strength had fallen heavily upon the delicate shoulders of Aunt Laura, although she learned to bully him both humorously and successfully. But on the whole the family had seemed exempt from grim tragedy. from those constantly hovering clouds which shadow many families from the beginning.

Now, with the first sharp break, there seemed to come disintegration. Six months after his son's death the Senator succumbed to a cerebral hemorrhage, and for the next few months Sally stayed with Mrs. Graham in the old place. Her presence and that of the boy seemed to comfort Laura Graham: young Don went to school in town but spent every week-end with his mother and grandmother. And Sally, who had thus far found herself unable to write anything that even the most sanguine imagination could picture a publisher or editor as being willing to print, was thankful to find herself of some use to this mother-in-law who was so much to her, whose devoted friendship had enriched Sally's youth and the life of Honor Dallam. One night she went upstairs with Mrs. Graham at bed time, she was still "Aunt Laura" to Sally, and that attitude of understanding had been another link drawing the two women closer. To-night Sally helped her old friend to undress, and then sat beside the bed, holding her hand. Afterward she recalled that Mrs. Graham had talked not of her husband or her son but of her own girlhood, of those schooldays long ago when she and Honor Hull had been room-mates and intimates.

"We used to argue about the Civil War, Sally. She was always on the side of the South, but my father was a New Yorker, though my grandparents were Virginians, so I didn't like people to abuse the North. And I remember your mother stopping in the middle of a heated argument to say: 'After all, Laura, I reckon Yankees are people, just like us in the South! And if you keep on visiting your relations up there in New York some day you'll be leaving Virginia to marry some black Republican with horns and hoofs'!"

To Sally, living through a world war, it seemed strange that any one should ever have hated a being so comparatively harmless as "a black Republican." Mrs. Graham ended her reminiscences with a shadowy little laugh:

'⁷But even your father was born in New Jersey, Sally!''

As Sally started to turn out the light Donald's mother said:

"Please hand me the little chain and locket on the bureau, dear. I always wear it, even in bed."

Sally found the delicate gold chain and fastened it about her Aunt Laura's throat. She knew the locket held a tiny miniature of the Senator as a youth of twenty, looking much like his grandson, Marion's young Jim. Laura Graham pulled Sally down to kiss her cheek, after the room was dark. She said very softly:

"I know! my darling, You think I'm old, past the keenness of your pain, the dreadful pain that comes to those who have so many years ahead . . . And it's true in a way. I'm too old for loneliness to frighten me as it would have done twenty years ago,—too sure that it can't last long, now. But ah, my dear, I understand! And you're Don's brave wife!"

Sally held the sweet face close to her warm breast, kissed the still beautiful hand, tapering and smooth as satin. Then she went away to lie awake for long slow hours. It was a comfort that Donny and his grandmother were both sleeping. But Mrs. Graham never woke again . . .

Somehow for Sally that endless year went on and on. She and Donny returned to the apartment after Aunt Laura's death, and then, as had been planned, he went to college that Autumn, to Yale where his grandfather had gone.

In the Spring of that same year, the year of 1917, when America went into the war, Sally got a letter from her young Freshman, a letter which tested the last ounce of that courage of hers upon which others harped so persistently. The gist of it lay in a few sentences:

"I've thought and thought about it, Mother darling, whether I ought to go, remembering all that's happened, all you've had to stand for. It's not been easy to decide, yet I think Dad would see things my way. For we can't take care of each other as we used to do, we three: the world has got to be made safe from those devils across the sea, safe for the children now playing with guns and dolls, for the children to come later, Jim's and Prim's and mine, perhaps. But I don't have to explain to you. I've been reading Uncle Geoffrey's articles; you have too, I know. So you'll understand that I can't wait, I've got to get in now, if they'll take me. And somehow I'm not afraid for you, or for myself. I'm sure to come back safe, and then you have your own work, the work Dad always believed in, and Uncle Geoff too, and that publisher chap, Mr. Gaunt. Oh, I am proud of you, blessed little Mother! But I've got to make you all-fired proud of me!"

Sally read and re-read the pages and her first shock of blind terror was succeeded by a curious sense of reassurance. From her high windows she could see today many flags flying in the wind. For months the city had been more crowded than she had ever seen it, more beautiful too, it seemed to her, with a poignant beauty stamped on the faces of the very strangers in the street, the strain and sacrifice visible on those faces suggestive of an altered, ennobled world. Sally told herself passion-

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ately that the boy was right, he was "sure to come back safe." After all had she not paid already, paid the full price women pay in war time? And would she have him act differently, Donald's son?

During those months that followed she carried her head proudly and mapped out a rigorous plan of life for herself. So many hours each day at her desk, so many hours a week in the Red Cross work rooms, so many people to see and things to do in the evenings.

She remembered Donald's insistence long ago on the value of her own work, recalled a phrase of his concerning the sort of women who make their lives "a damned crazy quilt without pattern or plan." Yet it occurred to her now that even Donald had never realized the menace which lies in purely imaginative work, the fact that one's tools may become twisted, rusted, warped from normal usage by personal grief or shock.

Constructive imagination, delicate fancy, colorful memories, all these Sally found wholly altered by her experience, and now suspense added a poignant and dreadful note to the discord. She worked each day, doggedly, without too insistent inquiry as to the value of the work. Yet there were shining moments: letters from Donny brought pure joy. And often her nieces Prim and Lola ran in to warm her with their fresh eager affection. At this period of her life Sally was discovering that inarticulate, uncrystallized, imaginative Youth hurts the bruised spirit less than the kindly platitudes of maturity. She rather evaded Marion, Jerry, many of her older friends, but the touch of Prim's lips to her cheek, the shy tenderness of Lola, these helped her.

One morning in the Autumn of that same year she was alone in the apartment writing at her desk which was covered with pages of loose manuscript. Despite her preoccupation she was keenly conscious of the beauty of the late September day. Above rooftops to the south hung a delicate haze pricked by those tall towers which Sally loved so well, while nearer at hand pigeons flew swiftly by, their wings bits of silver glinting in the sunlight. She stopped writing to watch one pigeon more scintillant and swift-winged than the others; then the sharp ring of her own doorbell startled her. It was the elevator boy with the mail and Sally brought the handful of letters to her desk. There were several long envelopes, business documents apparently; then she saw that one bore the return address of the War Department at Washington.

For a swift instant the years vanished; Sally was staring at a still figure, at another unopened letter. She experienced in that moment one of the bitterest emotions known to the human heart, passionate envy of the dead.

Then she opened her letter.

That first letter and others which followed contained a more than usually full account of one young American aviator's gallantry, and of his death. After the briefest possible training in America Donald Graham had made the Lafayette Escadrille and had served at the front. During those few months he had done valuable espionage work and later had destroyed many German planes. One morning while flying high above the German lines in order to get some much desired information he had been attacked by two Prussian machines. One he had crippled, but his own plane caught fire and though he maneuvered so skilfully that he got back to the Allied lines, he had no parachute, and was finally obliged to leap from his blazing plane. He had been instantly killed.

Sally sat with her hands crushing the stiff paper as two pigeons swooped down from the blue, one of them lighting upon the fire-escape not ten feet from her. There it poised, gleaming, iridescent, uttering lovely wings, a creature exquisitely alive . . .

And over there in France her boy lay dead.

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CHAPTER VII

SUCCESS AND FAILURE

THEY persuaded her to close the apartment and go away, but Sally insisted that she must go alone. She refused even the companionship of Prim or Lola, convinced that she must fight her fight with no witnesses.

She went to a little village in New England which she and Honor Dallam had visited in Sally's childhood. There for several months she lived among kind simple people who asked no questions and who treated her with the mixture of reluctant kindness and willing reticence characteristic of certain New England communities. And there she tramped long miles each day, in wind and cold and even flurries of snow, until at night she slept the dreamless sleep of sheer physical exhaustion.

There was an old stage driver whom she remembered: twenty-five years ago he had let little Sally Dallam drive his four horses up steep mountain roads, and because he was a man of great height—he must have been fully six feet five—she recognized him at once in the rugged ancient villager who "guessed" he might find a horse she could ride.

This old man had four grandsons in the army: the oldest and "smartest" of these, his grandfather's favorite and namesake, had been killed in Flanders. Old man Haines told Sally this, quite simply, looking at her black frock and white face with a strange gentleness in his eyes. It seemed that all his children were married and his wife dead, so he lived by himself in a little white house at the far end of the village. He owned the house and a part interest in the village store, and three of the best horses in the town. He was in fact a prosperous old man.

"Somebody at the Post Office says you write stories, Miz Graham." Sally had succeeded in her effort to find a horse and saddle and now was riding slowly from old Mr. Haines' barn to the turnpike, while he strode beside her, the chill November wind blowing the sorrel mare's long mane and tail.

"I used to," said Sally. "But I'm not sure I ever can again."

Old man Haines—this was his official title in the village—was looking off toward the mountains. His manner was impersonal, his air detached, he might have been talking to himself or to some invisible spirit of his own past. But what he said was:

"Stories in these here magazines air usually writ by folks as don't know nothin' about life. I'm thinkin' that if a person got hurt real bad, and knew how to write, he might set down something that would stay by ye." He paused; then added shyly: "There was a piece in a magazine not long ago, about a young boy as died overseas. I cut it out. Would you like to see it?"

Sally said she would, and a scrap of paper was put in her hand. There on her scraggy mount, with the wind blowing from the north, Sally read the poem. And she saw that it was signed by a nom de plume which Lois sometimes used.

The last verse ran:

"You went while living still was sweet Without a stain, You never dreamed that Youth is fleet, That Love is Pain . . ."

Sally handed back the clipping. For the first time in weeks that dreadful aching of her heart, of her whole torn spirit, seemed stilled. She remembered that walk from the hospital—nearly two years ago—her gift of thankfulness when she had said to Lois: "He will never have to endure a thing like this, pain like mine . .." After all even Don's suffering had been sharp but brief while his happiness had lasted over many years. And their boy had gone in his first splendid youth, "while living still was sweet . . . without a stain." Lois had understood, had written this thing.

The old shadow by her side, wordless too, tucked the

clipping back in his battered wallet. At the turn of the road he laid his hand on hers for an instant, the mare stood still and the old man cleared his throat:

"A body wouldn't think there could be such a hull lot of comfort in jest words."

She went back to town two months later physically strong and fit, conscious that she was not the type of woman who can live upon yesterdays. She must build some sort of new life. For Sally and her kind if one lives at all one must fight for vital existence in the present, not merely in the unreturning past, however beautiful, nor in some nebulous future promised by prophets and seers.

Yet at this period, like many other bereaved men and women the world over, Sally began to dwell upon that ancient unanswered question as to the survival of personality after death. She read the books of scientists widely known and much quoted, but no evidence that she encountered altered her secret conviction that, for her, effort to get into touch with those she had lost through psychic methods or mediums must mean self-deception, clouding the issues of life and death. More than this she felt that such effort, associated necessarily with other minds, would cheapen the beauty of her most precious memories. Yet she was conscious that already in her life she had had certain mental experiences which seemed inexplicable so far as she knew. They might be in no sense psychic or supernatural, those flashing premonitions which had come to her. But they wrought in her a fear of stupid negations and finalities, even a secret hope that sooner or later she might realize that most wonderful of human experiences, the conviction of having been in communication with one beloved and lost.

Yet day after day she fought for normality, for a hold upon the world she had and knew, and more and more the thing which came to mean hope, even salvation to her, lay in the reconstructing of her life on the lines of her own individual work.

She arrived in New York in midwinter and took a small suite of rooms in a downtown hotel, since her

apartment was still sub-rented. Here she began work upon the novel she had planned so happily two years earlier, painstakingly rewriting it from the beginning, seeking for the spirit of youth and adventure which had suggested the plot, endeavoring to mellow and enrich the style.

She saw Peter Gaunt soon after her return, and her look of health and vitality, the outcome of months in the open, gave him a somewhat exaggerated idea of the extent of her recovery. Like many persons of delicate physique, Gaunt had a fixed conviction that the secret of happiness lies in flawless health, and Sally smiled a little to herself after that interview. Quite without intending it she seemed to have bluffed her old friend, to have shown him her resilience, her determination to win back a normal life, and to have concealed from him all those inevitable reactions which follow in the train of any abnormal experience, and especially which relate to the grief of one who has seen the lives most dear and beloved broken off in youth or early maturity.

Peter had been the victim of ill health for many years, despite this he had done more than a normal share of the world's work, and the fact that he had missed marriage, with all its train of joys and responsibilities and possible griefs, had deepened in him the conviction that the mass of human beings overstate the value of the emotional life. Or so Sally read his curious blend of real interest and affection combined with a sharp insistence that she appreciate her advantages of health, of sufficient money, and of a chance to do valuable work.

She told him of her effort to remodel the novel she had long ago discussed with him, but he said little as to this beyond the fact that his firm would be glad to consider anything she might write. During the interview she felt a wall between them, a wall of temperament, of utterly different experience. All that the old stage driver and Dr. Dulaney had given her of understanding, of an indefinable hope and consolation, Peter seemed wholly to discredit. It was as though he had said: "Turn away from emotion, forget your troubles, live wholly in the mind, as I do."

Peter Gaunt had no realization of the fact that women, above all things, must *feel needed*. And yet in his handclasp, his smile, Sally felt a strange dim reaching for the understanding that did not exist. She went home with a wistful realization of the barrier between defined and unlike personalities. Peter had never really understood her happiness in the years that had passed, and now he could not realize the extent of her loss. On her side she had an extraordinary consciousness of the wealth she had known, the spiritual joy, the deep thrilling experience. True, she seemed inevitably bound to face suffering, while Peter appeared comparatively immune. Yet for his very immunity she had a sudden passionate pity.

At this time Prim, now really grown, a lovely girl in the early twenties, and gawky, brown-eyed Laura, meant more and more to Sally. They were constantly at the tiny hotel apartment, delighted by its doll-house charm. Prim talked of the war, of her course of hospital training—she was hoping it might mean France within the year—and Lola at fifteen was already dreaming that she would some day write, "like Aunt Sally."

Young Jim was in the army, training for service with the tanks, and Marion, though brave and selfcontained, had a way of looking at Sally, a strange dread in her eyes which her sister-in-law read as one reads plain print. Sally said to Lois Marlin:

"Marion is always saying to herself: 'Poor Sally! Am I going to be like that—is my son going to be taken from me—and if it happens, can I bear it, the way she bears it ?"

They were in Lois' lovely little sitting room, and manuscript strewed her desk: she had written many war poems, published in various magazines, and they were being collected into a small volume. Now she leaned over and laid her hand upon Sally's:

"Dear, you're morbidly conscious of people's minds, of what they're thinking about you. I wish you weren't so introspective, so analytical!" Sally gave a sigh; she looked white and spiritless, having worked more and slept less than usual during the past few weeks.

"Î wish I weren't, Lois." She added after an instant: "And that I didn't see things, understand people, realize how afraid of me men are—the husbands of my friends, Don's friends, even my own!"

"What do you mean, Sally?"

Sally got up and paced the room restlessly.

"I mean, Lois, that most men are horribly afraid of pain, afraid of seeing a woman who has been through death and grief, who has walked through Hell, after knowing Heaven. Oh, they're gentle, too gentle—men like Jerry, your husband, Don's partners—but they look at me as they'd look at a crippled thing, so kindly, yet with an aversion which I suppose is a sort of selfpreservation! They can't help it. I don't blame them! But up there in that New England village they didn't know my story as people do here, and they were different. Sometimes, in some moods, I'd like to see only new people, to forget all those I've known during my marriage!"

Lois linked her arm in Sally's, walked up and down beside her.

"I understand. Oh, I do understand, Sally darling." Then she added: "But your old friends—Anne, Geoffrey Kent—surely this doesn't apply to them."

"No; for I knew them before I was married, they care for me apart from all those years with Don and the boy. But they are horribly busy now—I've had just three letters from Anne in nearly two years, hardly more from Geoffrey, which of course is inevitable. I shouldn't want private friendship to interfere with work which at this time is the biggest thing there is."

Lois said: "Have you thought of going over?" Sally laughed. "I've applied to three different organizations, tried to go as a correspondent, a secretary, even a cook. You know I can cook—you taught me how. But there, again, being indelibly branded is a handicap. They want cheerful women, pretty gay girls, they don't want women in mourning, women no longer young who have lines in their faces and silly aching hearts . . .''

"Oh, my dear, my dear, this isn't like you," and Lois put both arms about her friend. Sally lifted her head, dashed away the tears that were wet upon her cheeks.

"Please don't mind me! It's a mood. I'll be all right—to-morrow." She added after a moment, in a low moved voice: "And Lois, I don't know what under heaven I should have done without you! Ever since that morning at the hospital your understanding has helped—it's been like a lifeline flung to a spent swimmer."

As she brought her little book to its end she had again a lift of the spirit, a mood of hope and pride. She had a feeling that Don would have said, as he had said so often in the past: "Good work, Sally!" She sent the book to Peter.

And then over the telephone there came the decision which shattered her delicate pale dream. Peter himself and both his partners had read the novel. They found the workmanship beyond criticism, and the story hopelessly improbable. They could not use it. In fact they felt that the book as it stood would not appeal to any publisher. It lacked solidity, realism, all the qualities which they were sure she could eventually put into strong and vital fiction. She must try again.

It was the next afternoon that Sally looked at herself in the glass, and fell to work effacing as best she might the subtle markings of a sleepless night. Lois had asked her to go to a reception given to a well known English artist and his wife, and she had accepted before she had heard the fate of her book. Now she told herself that the refusal of one small novel was not a thing to take seriously: she would fight through this slough of despond as she had already battled through infinitely more bitter experiences. She would not let them conquer her—those devils of depression and despair, the grinning imps always in the back of her mind, always asking what was the use of playing a game where the dice were loaded, the cards marked, hopelessly against you.

So she went to the reception held in a private gallery and given by the Society of Authors and Artists, and for the first time in her life she resorted to make-up, whereas hitherto she had kept fit and young looking by long walks or a cold shower. The result of a little powder and rouge amused her, and would probably deceive Lois. In her black depression she wanted no pity, no sympathy, even from this rare and comprehending friend.

The guest of honor, an English landscape painter, famous even before the war, and a baronet, had recently married a beautiful and fashionable wife. They were late arriving, and in the interval of waiting Sally met an old acquaintance of her own and a friend of Donald's. a portrait painter of real distinction. He was a man well on in the fifties, whom she had always liked, and his delicacy and tact were equal to the emergency. For he made her feel that she was the woman he had known. quite unchanged. Her morbid sensitiveness was disarmed by the courtesy and assurance of his manner, and she found herself discussing various pictures on the walls exactly as though years and stark tragedy had not intervened between this meeting and the last time he and Don and Sally had dined together at the Arts Club on a cheerful Sunday evening.

They were discussing a Sargent which Sally disliked and which the portrait painter considered a masterpiece, and she found herself defending her opinion with a touch of her old vivacity. Suddenly a hush fell over the room, the guest of honor and his wife had come at last, and the words died on Sally's lips. The Englishman she had never seen before, but his wife was a fair woman with lustrous hair and a profile pure Greek from the peak of bright hair above a low forehead to the tip of the lovely little nose. She was beautiful beyond any woman in the room, beyond any woman Sally had ever seen, save one. And as became her loveliness she was exquisitely dressed, in something cloudy and dim and

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yet with modish outlines which accented every curve of a faultless figure.

The eyes of Sally's friend followed her own, he saw her amazed recognition, and his shoulders lifted with a tiny gesture signifying half whimsical amusement. In his eyes was rather a dreary wisdom.

"You know her?" he said.

"I think so. Isn't she or wasn't she Helena Hart, originally from the South?"

⁽⁷Yes, I knew her too, in Virginia, long ago. She was a girl then, last year I met her again in Paris. She was a war-bride, married, I knew, for the third time. Her second husband was a wealthy Englishman, killed in the battle of the Marne. I hear she still receives alimony from her 'first',—they were divorced—and the tales she tells of him are astounding—to me. For I roomed with him at college."

Sally withheld her contribution to Helena's history, and the artist continued:

"As I understand her, and I began my education early, she has had just two ambitions, money and men. She has achieved both, and never with any open scandal; she's most discreet."

"She's wonderful!" said Sally. She felt that old astonishing sense of attraction and repulsion, was conscious of a mounting excitement, a rush of memories. She was thirteen again, loving Alfred Buchanan and distrusting the girl he loved with all a child's jealous passion. She felt again the stabbing pain she had known that summer in the Adirondacks when this woman's vivid beauty had seemed to blot out happiness and youth. She saw Jerry Ashe in a hotel bedroom, demoralized by that devil of desire menacing the future of four people. Now Alfred was dead, Don was dead, Jerry and Marion were close to middle age, with grown children and the hundred delicately destructive responsibilities and fears of maturity, and with the dreadful added pang due solely to the war. And Sally herself felt utterly altered, maimed in spirit. Yet here was Helena, unchanged, undefeated, about her still that air of challenge and assured consciousness of charm which some women retain to the end. She was selfish, false, ignoble, and completely successful!

"She looks like a girl," said Sally, "untouched by time and she's years older than I am."

The portrait painter looked at the animated central figure of the crowded room, then at the quiet woman in black at his side.

"Why shouldn't she, Mrs. Graham? The forces which age us are not so much years as emotion. We meet disappointment, responsibility, endure love—and pain. Helena Hart has always evaded these; that evasion has been the object of her existence. So her face is unlined, like a doll's. Why not? When all she's done has been to arouse emotion in others, make them suffer. She's smooth as silk, brilliant as an orchid, absolutely soulless. I know the type. I've painted women for thirty years."

The pain in Sally's eyes hurt him.

"My dear, don't envy her! If she'll never sound the depths she has never climbed the heights, either your heights! Her kind would turn Paradise into a beauty-parlor, smelling of manufactured perfumes."

The Marlins joined them. Did Sally wish to meet the distinguished pair? It seemed she did not, and presently they were leaving. But not before Donald's old friend had asked if he might see her again. They were alone for an instant and he said:

"Mrs. Graham, I would like you to know that your loss is mine too. I saw a good deal of your husband at our club, his going has meant a gap in my life which can never be filled. I should like to see you now and then, to talk of him." Sally flashed him a quick look, a blend of surprise and a pleasure sharp as pain. She said quickly: "Then you're unique in your attitude. Most men speak and act as though he had never lived!" She added:

"Of course I know that what seems like cruelty they mean for kindness."

She remembered for a long time the look of hurt understanding in the eyes of the elderly painter, and something in his voice, when he spoke of Donald, stayed with her, a note of tenderness, of delicate sympathy unmarred by pity.

During the next few weeks she worked indefatigably upon a series of short stories which she had been planning for years. She sent the novel out again, and yet again, but it came back from each publisher—She forced herself to work steadily despite the fact that her nights were becoming more and more hideous. What little sleep she got was broken, yet the vigorous health of years, her strong body and steady nerves, seemed still tireless, able to endure any agony of mind.

She tried to imbue the new stories with that vitality and characterization of vivid youth which had been the attraction of her early work and which certain editors regarded as the secret of her popularity among her modest following.

The war situation was now at its worst and Lois and Marlin had stopped all pretense of carrying on their personal work. After pulling many strings, they had been ordered to Italy where Marlin was to make a report on the munitions situation and Lois to do secretarial work in a little American hospital.

Parting with these friends was not easy for Sally, and at the last Lois regretted their decision and broke into unwonted tears.

"Leaving you is dreadful, Sally. If I'd realized how alone you'd be—with Marion and Jerry going South and Prim off to France—I should never have planned to go." She added what, in effect, they all said: "Thank God you have your work! And when I come home the book will be out and you'll be doing new things, always stronger and bigger."

Sally did not enlighten her as to the novel. And the next day the Marlins were gone.

One evening many weeks later, when the town seemed strangely dead without Lois or Marion or the children, Sally sat at her desk and stared at a great blinking electric sign which the light conservation crusade had not yet darkened. She had been home for months, had worked steadily, indomitably, had tried the little novel on many publishers without effect, had put it away and concentrated wholly on short stories, and they, too, had come back.

She told herself that her failure was not merely the refusal of a few manuscripts, but that in herself was some flaw, some weakness which had allowed events and suffering to conquer the quality and virility of her mind, the strong clutch of her will.

She dwelt upon that afternoon at the reception, upon Helena, still beautiful, young, loved by a man whose appreciation counted in the world's eyes. All that the portrait painter had said of her might be true, yet Helena stood for success, achievement, every hallmark of happiness, while she, Sally Graham, faced defeat, despair...

As she sat motionless, her mind reviewing the ironic changes of her life, she saw the blazing signs fade, the tall buildings blurred by gray mist. A little breeze blew her hair and cooled her cheeks. Dawn was tiptoeing across the city, like some lovely thief pilfering the jewels of Night; all her winking emeralds and rubies and diamonds suddenly disappeared. Then in the east banners of light were fluttering gloriously, Night was routed, a new Day born. Sally Graham faced it with dry eyes, that pride, which had been such an integral part of her being, shattered to atoms.

She saw herself for the first time as that faded, barren, useless being, the superfluous woman!

CHAPTER VIII

A DELAYED LETTER

W HILE Sally at home grappled with her own problem, Anne Dulaney, in France, was living that life of tense absorption in driving, concentrated labor which many women were experiencing for the first time.

Yet to Anne, as she worked passionately, the face of Sally Graham recurred again and again. Anne saw this face sometimes between pale and wan soldier boys, the eyes staring into her own, altered almost beyond recognition, all their gay youth dimmed by what seemed an ever-darkening shadow. And it was then that Anne began a sort of diary which she planned to send Sally. She told herself that no matter what happened, how her work crowded, she would add a little to that record of her life every day or two, This record concerned Sally also, and in part it ran as follows:

"Of course what I came for was to sing to the soldiers quite as much as to nurse them, but as it happens they need me in any and every capacity. I sing—when there is any voice or vitality left. For the rest I'm an assistant nurse, and there aren't many duties which fall to the lot of the graduate nurses that haven't come my way. I won't go into details about dull routine, but I'll tell you about a little red-headed Irish boy who came to us, we thought in a dying condition. He had lost blood until he looked like parchment, one leg had been badly amputated at a field hospital under fire, and he had several ghastly facial wounds and internal injuries which at first we couldn't adequately measure, although there seemed almost nothing left to work with. However, we tried the impossible and the miracle happened once again—he lived! And one morning I came to wash his poor face and give him his breakfast, and he looked up and said:

"'Sure, an' I've surprised the docthors. Ye all thought I was a weak-livered Paddy without any guts—I heard them sayin' how I couldn't live through the night. And now, young leddy, will ye kindly write to my wife an' tell her I'm doin' foine but that I want a bit of news of her an' the childer.' "'A wife, children!' I said. 'Why, how old are you, Michael Galvin?'

"Twinty-one last Christmas, an' the twins is sivin months an' the gurrl goin' on two year.' Then he added with a twinkle: 'An' how old is yersilf an' how many little Amerricans have ye brought into this bloody worruld?'

"I told him the melancholy truth, Sally, and he said: 'Sure, I'm sorry for you, leddy. An' if you'll take my advice you'll lose no more toime!'

"After that we were dressing his wound, it meant shear torture every time, and he had a horrible half hour. Afterward I sang for him, and oh, I sang my best! He deserved a private choir of archangels made up of Melba and the de Rezkes and Galli Curci—the plucky kid! When I'd sung 'Mother Macree' and the 'Baby Seal' lullaby of Kipling's—I wrote the music for it last year—he opened one eye on me, and the tears were still wet on his cheeks, though he'd never let out one sound. He said: 'I'm thinkin' singin' like that is a kind of a gift of itself, as good as knowin' how to get yerself married, Nurse! An' if you'll sing to single men you'll sure find a strappin' husband anny old time! But plaze don't be a-takin' him until I'm back in the trinches.'"

Under another date she wrote:

"The Irish boy is gone, not back to the trenches, but home to Donegal. And the day after he went they brought a new American surgeon into my ward, and it was Jim Graham! Sally, we stood and stared at each other, and then he kissed me before the whole room, on each cheek! I got as red as fire and of course my boys giggled. They're like a lot of schoolgirls, itching for excitement and amusement except when they're in acute torment, or dying. Since then he and I have had dinner together twice. He's staying on, taking the place of one of the surgeons who has been ill, and oh, Saily, even as a friend Jim Graham is the most splendid mortal God ever made except your own Don! And Sally, I'm envying you still, envying the lame Irish boy. For you've both known the best there is, the joy of loving, of being loved! You have kissed your own baby, tasted the pride of possession! Oh, I know what you're enduring now, the unspeakable loss, the loneliness-I know, my own Sally! But I tell you I envy you just the same. Jim is wonderful, I'm proud of him, God knows. But you see, there's another woman, a woman he's loved for many years. He told you about her long ago, and afterwards you met her, though I know that you never guessed,-the dear, blind, happy Sally you used to be."

A week later she wrote:

"She's dead, Sally, that woman Jim loved. And she must have been rare and beautiful, with a great spirit, a woman who could keep her own husband and our Jim, both worshiping her, trusting her. as men sometimes trust each other, or God, but rarely trust a woman! Jim never told her that he loved her. never spoke to her of love, but once she was very ill and he blurted the whole thing out to her husband as a boy might have done, and from that time the two men have been devoted friends in their own queer way. Sounds like an improbable tale, but it's just Jim, and true! She died six months ago—a malignant growth—they operated, but without success. Jim attended the case, and Hugh, the husband, begged him to let her go sooner. Jim wanted to, was tempted, but felt he couldn't. They kept her under opiates, she suffered very little and in the end died in her sleep.

"Then Jim took Hugh up to the Adirondacks, to the camp Marion and Jerry had long ago. They climbed and fished and lived out of doors for two months, until Hugh was well again. mentally normal. And helping his friend meant helping himself too. At last Jim got back to his office, found an older surgeon to take his place and came over to France."

She added a last sentence on a separate sheet:

"Sally Dallam, will you tell me how a woman could help loving a man like that?"

The next entry came ten days later:

"Sally, Sally, in this Hell of pain and squalor and misery, with men dying constantly, always short-handed, overworked, shadowed by the dreadful fear of what the end may bring if America has come in too late, I am walking in light, touched by the finger of God, breathing beauty as my poor boys breathe ether or oxygen. For the miracle of miracles has come to pass, unless I'm dreaming. Last night he took me to supper, walking through the dark streets to a little restaurant with a Swiss proprietor and a wizened little French cook who is also a genius. On the way in the drizzling rain—and we'd both forgotten our umbrellas—he held my arm, said hardly a word until we were almost there. Then he spoke, in that beautiful hushed voice he saves for sick babies and dumb brutes and people he's afraid may die: 'Anne, I've always loved you,—since you were a little girl. But now it's a different sort of love. I want—will you marry me, dear?'

"The curious thing is that I didn't laugh or cry or faintnothing of the sort. I just said: 'Yes, Jim, if we can stay here and go on working together.'

"Sally, we ate our dinner, a real dinner—I think there was steak, with sugar in our coffee, and red wine. All the time I felt as though God's hand were touching me, and the touch healed, changed the very course of my blood, gave me back my youth, made me beautiful, Jim's eyes told me that! Yet we only talked of our work, and ate, and Jim smoked some dreadful cigarettes, and outside it went on raining, straight lines of rain that spattered against the pavement. We sat by a window, nobody was near us . . Or, Sally darling, forgive me for not really understanding before—all you had, all you have lost! And I have asked God to forgive me, too,—for never having be lieved in Him until now. When you add to war love, and the unconquerable beauty of the human soul, only God seems to explain."

This letter of Anne's, showing the sequel to that old tale of secret, unrequited devotion, might have meant to Sally a lift over a dark, rough road, its beauty sprung like some flaming flower against a background of desolation. It might have recalled her own philosophic acceptance of the truth that most lives have their periods of vivid joy as well as of desolating grief. For in Sally was still a capacity to rejoice in the happiness of those whom she loved.

But the letter was delayed, as so many letters were delayed in those dark months of confusion and uncertainty and fear throughout the world. Between the date of posting and of final delivery long weeks elapsed, and during these weeks Sally's life flowed into new channels.

CHAPTER IX

SPIRITS OF THE PAST

O^N a day in June, after dragging and sleepless nights, Sally Graham went down to Long Island for a glimpse of the house that had been closed so long. It had been a rainy and dun colored world as seen from the city. But on Long Island the sun shone bright and warm, and yielding to a sudden impulse Sally found an old bathing suit and went for a swim. The water was elear and cold. Against her tired body it felt deliciously tresh, while above her the glory of an opalescent sky made for beauty almost incredible compared with the grimness of that gray city of rain and humidity, shadowed by the menace overseas.

While she was still in deep water she was seized for the first time in her life by a cramp. For an instant she was helpless, a human straw eddying upon the deep. There was a brief sharp battle, the pain of her useless imbs seemed unbearable and the outcome hopeless then she remembered facing danger long ago with Donald by her side, all life ahead.

She forced herself to swim with one arm; after a little the pain eased, she swam more strongly, found that she could move her legs again. At last, after what seemed a long, long time, she found herself clinging to the ladder leading to the dock.

A red haired boy, son of a local farmer, whom Lola and Donny had known and played with years ago, came lown the road which passed near the boat-house. He salled out:

"You gave me a scare, Mrs. Graham. I thought you was all in !"

Sally drew herself up to the platform and sat down for an instant, exhausted. She explained to the boy: "I had a cramp; for an instant it was touch and go." The boy—his name was Jack Baine—stood looking at her, and he spoke with the authority of his sex:

"You hadn't ought to go in alone, Mrs. Graham. Let me know next time and I'll go with you." After an instant of hesitation he added shyly: "You know, Mrs. Graham, I was awful sorry about Don. I tried to enlist too, but I've got bum eyes and they turned me down."

Sally smiled at him, thanked him, and he went away slowly, looking back and waving to her.

At the house in her own room Sally got into dry clothes and decided that she would stay for several days. The swim had exhausted her and yet given her a sharp distaste for returning to the crowded city. She had brought sandwiches and fruit, and to-morrow she would telephone to the village for supplies. Perhaps she could get Mrs. Baine to help her put the house in order. And she remembered with satisfaction that she had told the hotel clerk to forward her mail if she stayed over night.

But though she went to bed at eleven she could not sleep. For she was obsessed by a haunting regret, the feeling that she had let slip an opportunity. If she had struggled less, let herself drift with the current, the problem of her future would have been solved simply and finally. Throughout the night this thought recurred ...

In the delicate dawn as she watched light and color return there flashed upon her brain a solution, luminous, dazzlingly simple. What had happened, her seizure of cramp, the coming of the boy and their brief talk, made possible and simple an "accident" which might follow to-morrow. She would go in again, swim far out... and Jack would tell his story. Thus there would be no suspicion or suggestion of intent, no chance that the courage and endurance of others would be weakened by her example.

The creeping insistent thought of escape through what some one has called "the open door" had lain deep in Sally's mind for a long time, perhaps years. Possibly it had been suggested first by the mad act of that young architect whom Don had tried to help, or earlier, by something heard or read in childhood.

In the hour of shock or bereavement we are all apt to be stimulated by the excitement of insistent change, upheld by the sympathy of friends. Later the excitement dies, active articulate sympathy fades to the dull hue of habit. Yet the victim of inevitable tragedy is more than ever alive to the inescapable pain of consciousness. So to Sally life seemed to grow each day more unutterably dreary and meaningless. Her work had been like one little window in a great blank wall. Now this window seemed closed, boarded up. She saw all she had done as sheer failure, feeling in herself no fresh springs of creative energy.

As she lay motionless, her beloved house still and empty yet crying aloud of all that unreturning radiant past, the hope of escape became as vivid as the bars of sunlight streaking her ceiling, falling across her bed.

Thought of her mother's faith in an all-loving omnipotent God brushed her mind, swiftly followed by a defensive insistence that such a God would not demand that a creature tortured beyond endurance must continue to live.

At last she fell peacefully to sleep, utterly content, with a sense of possessing her old poise and power. She slept late, awoke refreshed. The way looked simple and straight.

She cooked her belated breakfast, telephoning to Jack Baine's mother and asking her to do some necessary cleaning, and Mrs. Baine agreed to come. Every detail now dovetailed as though the event had been planned for months.

The day was fresh yet warm. Vast reaches of vividly blue sky were flecked by gleaming clouds, a breeze from the Sound was blowing through open windows. Sally wandered about the house with a fresh sense of its beauty, an exaltation sprung from so many radiant memories, for with this home, until now, was linked no tragic happening; it stood for clear happiness, glowing, untainted youth. And the simple fine furniture,

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the massed books in the living room, a lovely old desk which Don's mother had given him at the time of his marriage and which they had finally brought here from the city apartment, all these gave her pleasure, a feeling of delicate pride. sh

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In the boy's room she stood for a long time looking at his collection of photographs, grouped together against a warm toned wall, photographs of herself and Donald, of Donny in a group with Prim and young Jim and Lola, a charming sketch of Anne made recently by Marlin, and beside this the stern young head of Jim Graham, a photograph taken fifteen years ago.

Sally wondered whether that arrangement had been intentional, whether the boy had any inkling of Anne's secret preference for the surgeon uncle whom all the children in the family adored . . . She knew that Jim had gone to France at last, and wondered how and where he was to-day. She went across to the photographs and kissed those of Don and the boy. How incredible it was that they should survive, these trifling bits of pasteboard, when the living originals had vanished from the world.

She found her bathing suit on an upstairs porch, dried by sun and wind, and felt relief as she saw and handled this symbol of her new freedom. Yet she did not undress just yet. The afternoon was hot and bright, and she looked at things in the room, trifles that she had loved, and which those two had touched so often. Ah, this perpetuity of inanimate things—how it tore at the tangled roots of pain and joy deep within you!

Yet with the pain came the restfulness of decision, the sudden slipping away of that dread of interminable years ahead, the dread which had obsessed her so long.

As she dropped for a moment into a shabby easy chair her eyes traveled to the shelf of books where stood many of Honor Dallam's old favorites, and thence to that improvised window-seat about which Don had inquired two years ago. The little trunk was actually full of old letters, the treasure-trove of girlhood and youth, foolish happy letters which she had always told herself she would burn, but the sentiment which clings to such bits of the past had prevented their destruction. She had laughed at herself, at her inability to destroy those symbols which women so inevitably overrate and men as inevitably ignore . . But at least she could arrange now that others might accomplish this destruction; she found a card and wrote: "Contents of this trunk to be burned in case of my death," signed it, and tacked it firmly upon the top.

Then it occurred to her that there were letters she herself should burn. She looked at the handwriting, touched the cords which bound them together, Don's young eager letters, written during their engagement and meant for her eyes alone. She took them to the fireplace and with steady hands lighted them, watched them shrivel to the last ash.

She went back to the trunk, sat down on the floor beside it and touched package after package with fingers sensitive and tender.

She found a little heap of recent notes from Peter Gaunt in relation to her work. He had been a steadfast friend, and if temperamentally he was incapable of understanding her capacity for the extremes of both joy and anguish she felt that he would yet be the last to judge another human being in an hour such as this she was living through, could he know of it. For in Peter was no harsh Puritanism, no dull insistence that others parallel his own high and lonely trail.

A bundle of her own letters to Don made her smile. The writing was black after all the years; what an intolerance she had had always of pale inks! But she would not open one letter, being still obsessed with the terror of tears.

Yet before she burned this package also she was conscious of a definite perfume, and with it a flashing memory of her mother's little garden in Washington, of fresh flower petals she had once thrust in an envelope with a tiny note, and sent to Don. She had been ill, unable to write one of her many-paged eager letters, but in a few lines she had phrased her need of him. Now that mood, and the girl she had been, seemed a dream, the dream of another and utterly different life.

As she plucked a letter here and there from the thick packages she became conscious of a growing wonder. This was Geoffrey's, a thin package of friendly notes written during those two years while Don was in Italy; this faded writing was all now left of the whimsical devotion of Alfred Buchanan for a loving little girl, and this was a bundle of her mother's letters written while Sally was at school.

As she touched the envelopes, read a line or half a page, she began to see the past more vividly than she had ever seen it. Of recent years the two Donalds seemed to have been hers always, to have made her whole life. Now as the old trunk revealed its forgotten riches she saw how full those early years had been of Youth's eager explorative friendships, now whimsical and elusive. now touched with a hint of passion, again frank and sweet with the honest love between girl and girl, and surely no relation in life is sweeter or more selfless than this fragrance of blossoming maidenhood.

Letters from Anne woke in her a hundred memories. She opened one written after her own marriage, dipped into the full pages:

"Sally, it's a nuisance to miss you as I do. I never meant to be such a sentimentalist; I tell myself that the men who call upon me evenings are far more to the point than the fact that I once had Sally Dallam to talk them over with. But I can't fool myself. One real friend is worth many make-believe lovers, and that's all they are, except John. And John won't do, I'm afraid never will do. I go to see your mother evenings, and she's always sweet, but while we're together we're both thinking about you, wanting you more than ever. In a novel I've just read there's something about youth—that it's 'final, mawkishly sentimental'—and I suppose it is. Just the same, Sally, don't let's ever grow old!"

Another letter she had quite forgotten was from Leonard Reid, whom Anne had called "the starved Sparrow," and Sally remembered his talent, the streak of

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omanticism through everything he had written. Theirs ad been a happy, whimsical comradeship. This paricular letter had been written during a visit Sally had baid the Grahams at the Long Island place:

"It seems centuries since you left, Sally, and Spring is waiting for us. There's a spot not far from here, near a clump of wilows and a creek. The Lord made that place for you and me. It's away from the cars and the colored people, in the woods with the stream at one's feet and the green roof overhead. You can see violets tucked under the green, blue eyes looking up at you, and jasmine grows in little sweet bunches, the roots come up in cool earth. You make boats out of oak leaves, and are happy.

"Come back, Sally, we can hardly wait, the violets and the jasmine, the little stream and I. You see, in the whole world there's no other woman who always understands the pain of trying to count as an artist, the sense of failure, the moment of vision, the dream of what one will do-to-morrow—the aching fear that to-morrow may never come.

"But you'll come, Sally, and I'm thanking God that you're my friend, that you're coming home."

To Sally the faded characters wrought sheer magic; they evoked her youth, her memory of a boy's peaked face and sensitive hands, the hands of the master workman. He had given her something fine and real, something which Don had later recognized, respected.

The next envelope she opened had a Chicago postmark; it had been written by Geraldine Tait, and one paragraph caught her attention:

"You gave me my fresh start, Sally, even though I resented your influence, hated having come. Those first weeks were horrible. And then I began to come out of the cloud, as people come out from ether, began to see what you did for me when you said that about secrecy always killing love. You were right, Sally. I know it now."

Strapped with this letter was a wedding invitation, dated three years afterward. Geraldine had married; a few scattered letters, later on, indicated that she too had known happiness.

Sitting on the floor beside the open trunk Sally was conscious of a smell of camphor and rose leaves and leather, and of something else, something intangible, invisible, imperceptible to any of her five senses, yet real. From the foolish little trunk with its freight of sentimental memories a strange thing issued, a force which seemed to imperil this freedom of which she had been dreaming...

She drew a note from a yellowed envelope, a note from Wade, written after her marriage, and the brief page and characteristic writing brought back that evening in his office, the walk by the muddy Potomac months later, his lawless magnetic personality.

"I want you to know this: at last I am glad of your happiness. I shall not remember so long your angry virtue, Sally Dallam, as that nobler force, the rare integrity of a fearless, unconquerable spirit."

Sally dropped the sheet as though the words had burnt her fingers.

Suddenly she was conscious of blind terror, the terror that something or some one was stealing her will! Under the impulsion of fear she rapidly undressed, slipped into her bathing suit, adjusted cap and shoes with care. Then she locked the trunk; on her desk she examined again a little pile of papers, her will, fire insurance policy, a list of the securities in her safe deposit box. All these she put into a pigeon hole where they could be easily found. Then she looked at herself in a mirror and was glad that she looked younger, more her old self than she had seemed in months, warm color staining her lips and cheeks.

With every sense alert she stepped into the warm sunshine, closed the front door behind her, saw that the stretch of blue water and the road leading to the village were empty of humankind. She looked back at the house, at the lawn beginning to show here and there a vivid green, at the flower garden, the tennis court, at her own windows open to breeze and sun. Alert and vigorous she felt the beauty of the world break upon her in luminous waves. Ah, she was glad of the beauty! To carry with one the consciousness of such radiance healed even the pain of dying, imparted to death itself dignity and calm.

CHAPTER X

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THE DEBT OF HONOR

SHE swam rapidly and was soon in deep water, but she was puzzled by the strangeness of her sensations. For, though her body obeyed her will, her mind was still in the room with the old trunk, with those obsessing letters, with that vague mist of impressions, memories, fragrances.

Some automatic force quite apart from her own desire or intent was forcing her back into that room. A voice was speaking to her, a voice which seemed insistent, possessed of a masterful and virile eloquence. She was alone, yes. After glorious years there had come sharp change, death: she was living on after the end of youth, happiness, living in an empty world. Yet need loss and pain make of Sally Dallam a coward, a quitter? For after all she was still whole, sane.

The voice sounded clear, distinct. It had authority, remembered personality. She was swimming out toward open sea yet that will, apart from herself, dominated her. An incident of her childhood flashed across her mind, the time she had gone to Alfred's room and he had taken a long time to open the door. She smelled again that curious odor. Many times that vivid memory had recurred; but now she knew, with sharp certainty, exactly what had happened that day, or rather what a child had prevented from happening. The odor had been that of illuminating gas . . . again she heard Alfred's voice, almost felt the clasping arms that hurt, —"Sally, you count more than you know! If it hadn't been for you—"

In the deep cool water she had her moment of recognition, of something like the joy which had thrilled her in those long gone days of her first friendship. She had really saved him . . from that! And the voice 321 was his voice: it seemed to her that his personality. invisible, intangible, beyond space and time, still lived, still remembered, still protected her. After all she had known the fulness of life-the deep heart of friendship, the flower of love, the sacredness of passion, the sharp thrill of marriage, motherhood. Beside these normal yet rarely perfect experiences. as human lives are measured, there had been her first youth, full to the brim of vital living, body and brain. Alfred had said: "You'll work hard, little Sally, tell the truth, the people vou love will love you." His words, the clear sweetness of his voice, came to her there in the wide blue sea. Despite everything that had happened his prophecy had Again memory seemed lost in this sense come true! of present reality.

Then a picture took shape in her mind as vivid as the voice had been, memory of her own sitting room that last night of her girlhood when she had said good-by to her friends. She had spoken to them of a debt she owed them, the full phrase in her mind had been "a debt of honor." Did she not still owe this debt? To those living friends of childhood and youth, to all the benign influences of her life, to her mother, her husband, her son, all dead yet none the less immortal while she had memory, while this mysterious ripple of personality went on and on, perhaps forever.

Swimming automatically Sally Graham had a vision of a new life to be lived in the old scarred pitiful world, a life different, finer, more selfless, more impersonal. And then suddenly she knew that she was freed from the power of her own obsession, rescued by some force or influence beyond her puny self. She could not do this thing she had planned, she saw it now as evasion, a weak surrender.

Brain and will were again normal but physical peril menaced her. She was perhaps a mile from the shore, farther than she had ever been, alone. For an instant she doubted the possibility of swimming back. Then she recalled Don's old method for saving one's strength. She floated, realizing with a rush of relief that the tide had turned, was sweeping inland. After a little she began again to swim.

On and on she labored, hearing again what she had heard years ago, that sound like the beating of a mighty heart. Her muscles ached, but there was no recurrence of the cramp of yesterday. This seemed a point in her favor. Yet she grew more and more weary, began to fear that in the end she must be beaten by the Sea, saw a swift vision of the morrow, her body lying quite still in her sunny bedroom, the place peopled by those invisible reproachful presences.

Then she knew that she had reached the end of her strength; she could swim no longer. For a moment she fought this strange dimming of every sense—then she seemed to hear a faint sound, some one calling. . . . Again that lifted curtain of the years. Surely she saw Donald's wet tense face, heard his voice . . .

Reluctantly she drifted back to consciousness—to the rough music of the most virulent tongue-lashing she had ever known. The red haired boy had pulled her into his boat, somehow; he was alternately sobbing and swearing. She had disobeyed him, had gone into deep water as no woman had a right to do alone. As he swore his hot tears ran down and splashed upon her face. She heard him say:

"God damn it all, if she goes and dies what'll Don think of me? He always said I was a durned poor oar . . . and now he's dead—in France!"

Sally opened her eyes, her whole body ached, she knew immeasurable weariness and depression. Yet she smiled, a reluctant smile, at the sight of that agonized freckled face.

"I'm not dead, Jack. You've saved me. And perhaps Donny knows."

She slept the night through as though she had been drugged, and in the morning Jack's mother brought her breakfast to her room, and with it a handful of mail.

Sally drank her coffee eagerly, all the while touching the letters with her hand as one touches the velvetpetaled cheeks of little children. The first was that diary from Anne so long overdue, radiating the happiness of fruition, of a love achieved at last, sketched in swift words against the background of war and death. As she read Sally was conscious of an immeasurable gratitude that no act of hers would mar the joy of those two, after parched and lonely years.

Then came a letter from Geoffrey Kent telling her that he had been injured in an air raid, ordered home, his usefulness cut short. Yet in every line she read his will to live, that characteristic dominant note of the man's unfailing courage. He told her that she was one of the few upon whom he could rely, a friend who would neither humiliate him by a weakening pity nor shrink from the brutal fact that he was maimed. And what right had he to escape more than the others, the young immortal dead, all those shattered yet indomitable living men? He wanted her to know that his right arm was uninjured, his eyes unhurt, salvage from the wreck. After all could a man ask more than the power to earn his bread by work that he loved?

As she read Sally's eyes glowed, her lips made one straight line. She found herself thanking unseen powers, abetted by a red haired boy, that she still could be counted worthy of a brave man's friendship.

The third letter seemed to her almost clairvovant. It was from Peter Gaunt whom she had not seen in many weeks. He felt sure she was going through some new difficult readjustment. At their phase. some last meeting he had felt awkward, tongue-tied, ignorant. Now what he wanted to suggest was that she put behind her the romantic fancies of her youth as to the making of fiction . . . She must begin new work, the thing she could do now, the books she was to write in the future. modified by no facile philosophy, no futile romanticism, but salt with the savor of life, beautiful with the beauty of facing truth without fear or evasion. She had paid the price of wisdom.

In the room, where once Sally Graham had known unclouded happiness and where yesterday she had said good-by to past and future, the sun poured upon her its living gold. She read Peter's letter a second time, then lay with closed eyes, conscious of an exaltation as poignant as pain. For the first time since that morning in the hospital she thought of Donald joyously, remembered not those few black hours but all his happy years of living. Her mind traveled back to an old garret smelling of dust and apples and faded leather, to a little girl on a mottled hobby-horse with a book upon her knee. And she saw a boy's flushed face, heard his scornful challenging young voice:

"The Lord knows kissing isn't all of life, Sally Dallam!"

No, it was not all, love was not all, marriage was not all, nor even the pang of motherhood, the sharp delight of chosen work. The very gap Death made was not all. Yet if you knew these you had traveled far, passed through many climes and countries of the spirit, tasted the stimulant of joy and the deeper draft of pain. Like those war-scarred men in Europe you too had been tortured, spiritually maimed, yet you had chosen to live.

She remembered a beautiful phrase of some forgotten poet, "the wings of Time". . . Surely she knew the sweep of those mighty wings, knew that time is the final test, of integrity, of courage, of the value of work and the selflessness of love. The beat of those wings had brought her at last what youth and cloudless joy may not attain, understanding. And with it the will to labor, the capacity to serve.

THE END

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